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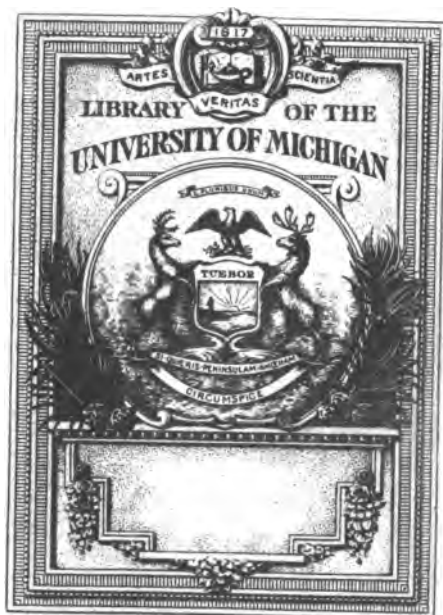
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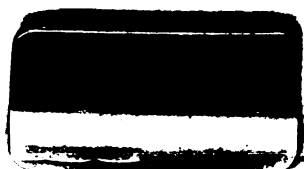
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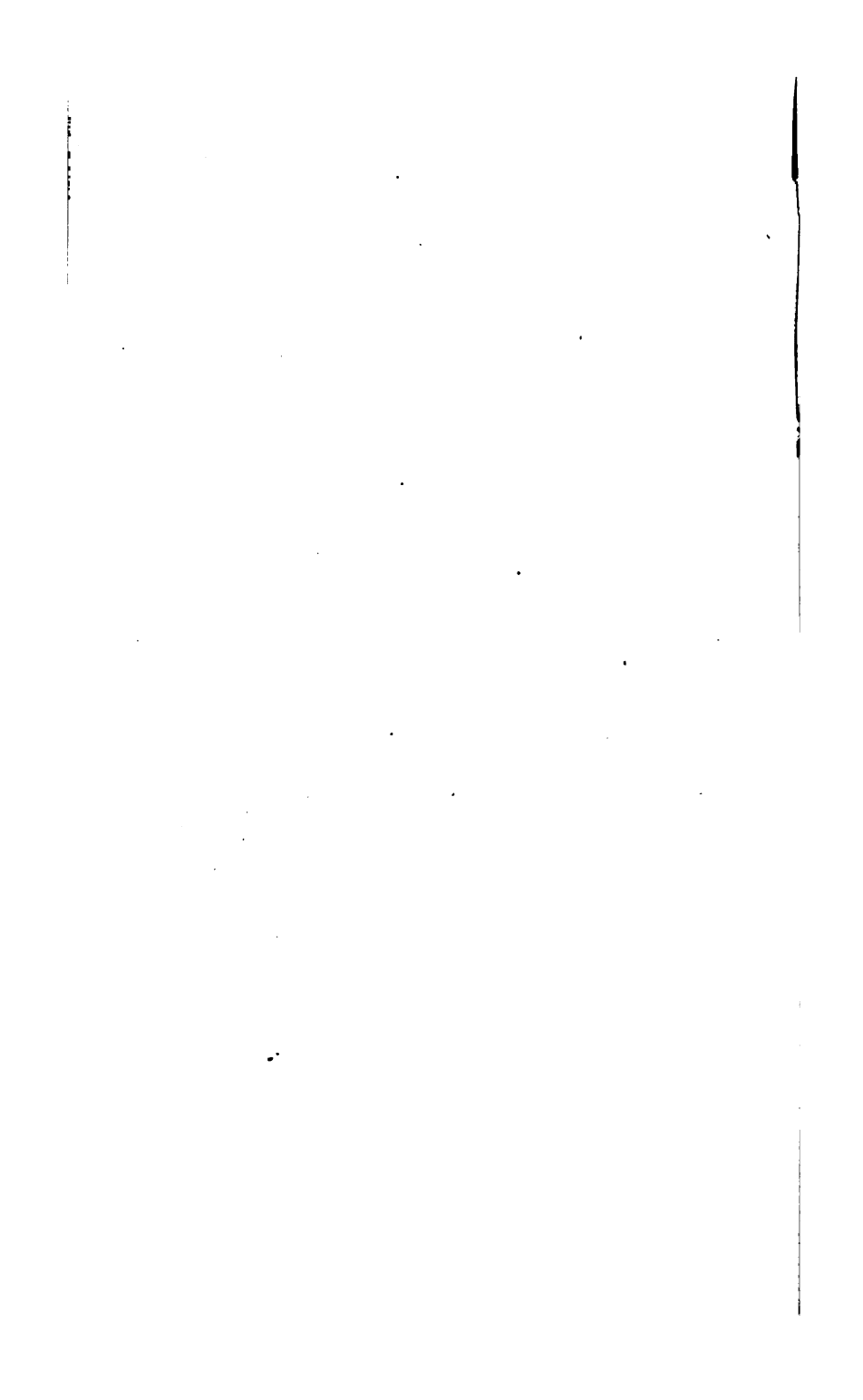
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SERMONS

ON

PUBLIC WORSHIP.



SIX SERMONS,
ON THE
CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF THE NEGLECT
OF
PUBLIC WORSHIP:

A VIEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP;
THE MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO ITS OBSERVANCE;
AND
THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH RENDER AN ATTENDANCE UPON
ITS ORDINANCES UNPROFITABLE.

BY THE
REV. ROBERT SHIRLEY BUNBURY, A.B.,
CURATE OF STAPENHILL.

"Why is the House of God forsaken."—NEHEMIAH xiii. 11.

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PREFACE.

It may tend to explain the nature of the following Discourses, and furnish some apology for their publication, simply to state the objects at which they aim. These are three-fold.

First, an earnest desire to induce those who habitually neglect public worship, to engage in this reasonable and delightful service. Secondly, the humble hope of leading others to a more regular and profitable attendance upon Divine ordinances. And, thirdly, the desire to induce those who value and enjoy the services of the sanctuary, to exert their influence in drawing others to adopt the same sentiments.

There are few subjects more generally and deeply lamented than the neglect of public worship, and the want of profitable attendance upon its ordinances; yet it is somewhat remarkable, that less has been written on this subject, than on any other of equal importance, connected with the spread of the Redeemer's kingdom. And when it is remembered, that from calculations made by those who have the best means of information, not more than one-third of the population of this

even non-Conformist

iv.

country attend any place of public worship, it is deeply to be regretted that more strenuous and effectual efforts have not been made to induce the people to attend the house of God.

The Author has long felt the necessity of some small publication embracing the subjects of the following Discourses, as the neglecters of public worship are necessarily deprived of the means of public instruction; and it is frequently difficult, for many reasons, to gain access to them in private, or, in those short interviews, to be able to correct their errors, and inform their minds on a subject of such extent and importance.

He gladly avails himself of this opportunity to express (in common with many of his brethren in the ministry,) his sense of deep gratitude to those valuable members of society, our Sunday School Teachers, and District Visitors, who so materially contribute to alleviate the weight of ministerial responsibility, and to render our ministry effective, especially in large towns. He would affectionately submit to their consideration the following extract from an American writer, (with which he has lately been furnished,) as it embodies and happily expresses some of the objects aimed at in the following Discourses, and will be found literally applicable to this land as well as to America.

“The people of God might effect great things by a general, united, systematic, and persevering course of

efforts, to induce the community to go to the house of God on the Sabbath. Even in the most favoured and religious part of this land, it has been computed that not more than one-third of the population are in the habit of regularly going to public worship. There are no limits to the power of kind persuasion. And if the church of Christ would make but half the efforts to induce the people to go to the house of God, which is frequently made to get people to our elections, the almost entire population would be found regularly at the sanctuary of God. How few churches have made any attempts to induce the people to go with them to the house of God! In almost every village there are scores sleeping in the grave-yards, and scores now living, who, with proper efforts, might have been regular attendants at church; but whose feet, as things have been, have seldom entered the sacred place. This is a new field of labour and enterprize, and one which, I doubt not, would yield our churches an abundant harvest."

May the Lord graciously grant that this feeble effort to promote His glory, and the welfare of men, may be owned and blessed by Him "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy;" and that it may induce some to attend the house of God, and assist others in deriving benefit from its ordinances; and stimulate Christians more frequently to address to their neighbours the beautiful invitation, "Come ye, and let us go up to

the house of the God of Jacob ; and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths." May the Lord hasten the time when this shall be the language of His people, and "all nations shall flow unto the Lord's house."

STAPENHILL,
BURTON-ON-TRENT.

1839.

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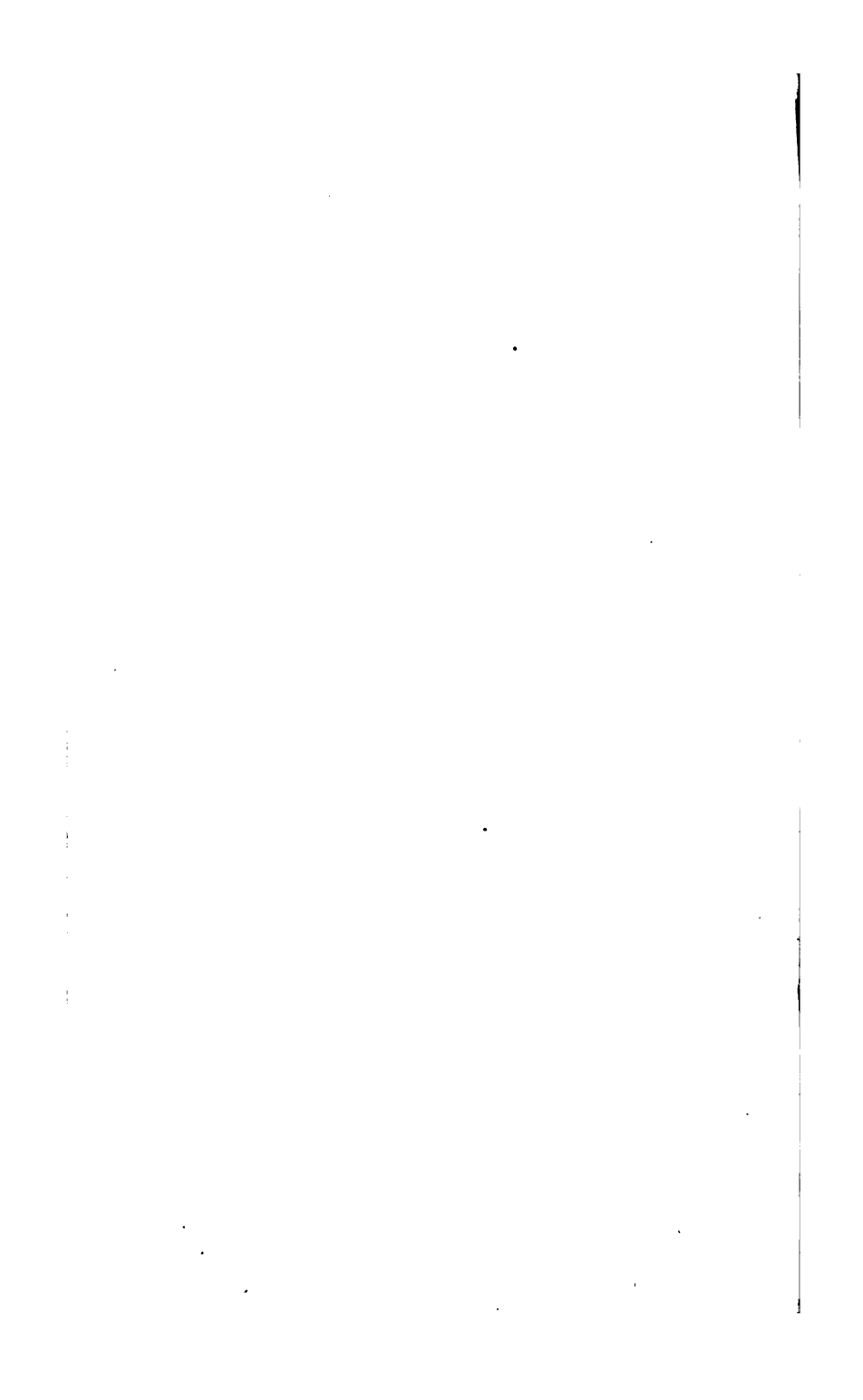
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SERMON I.

A CONSIDERATION OF THE REASONS COMMONLY ALLEGED FOR THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

NEHEMIAH xiii. 11.

“WHY IS THE HOUSE OF GOD FORSAKEN?”

MAN was originally formed in the image of God. God dwelt in him as in a temple. He lived in the full and unclouded enjoyment of His presence with whom “there is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand there are pleasures for evermore;” and held direct and sweet converse with his Heavenly Father. There was then no need of temples made with hands, for the whole universe proclaimed its Maker’s praise, and obeyed its Maker’s will. But no sooner had man sinned, than he lost the moral image of God. Sin defiled, and God forsook, His temple; and man, cast down from his high original, lost the knowledge of God, became degraded in his nature, depraved in his habits, and impaired in his faculties. Thus fallen from that holy state in which he was created, and changed as to the circumstances in which he

was placed, he needed the means of instruction in order to know his Maker's will, as well as an atoning sacrifice to restore him to His favour, and renewing grace to fit him for His service.

And though man could never have anticipated that such gracious provision would have been provided, by Him against whom he had sinned, from whose presence he had fled, and of whose judgments he was afraid; and might have reasonably expected that he would abandon our guilty and apostate race; His mercy shone forth in the brightest colours, compassionating our wretched condition, and He graciously devised the means whereby the "banished might be restored." His Son willingly offered himself as a sacrifice for our sins, and undertook to work out an everlasting righteousness for man. The Holy Spirit interposed His gracious aid to render that work effectual to man's salvation, by revealing it, carrying it home, and applying it to the sinner's heart. That man, thus rescued from ignorance, guilt, and misery, might be restored to the knowledge, love, and service of his God, a revelation was given to him, informing him of the sad state to which sin had reduced him here, and the misery to which it exposed him hereafter; and while this revelation distinctly states, and clearly marks, God's abhorrence of sin, and indignation against the sinner, it unfolds and exhibits to man the goodwill and merciful intention of his Heavenly Father in the provision He has made for his recovery from sin, and restoration to His favour.

In order that the glorious truths of revelation might be more fully known, and the end for which it was designed might be accomplished, the ordinances of public worship were instituted; and, under the gospel dispensation, all people are invited to come up to worship in God's holy temple, to hear all the words of eternal life, and freely to participate in the blessings of salvation. And when we reflect how dependent man is, and how dependent God has made him upon the ordinances of His house for spiritual instruction and spiritual blessings, well may we ask, "Why is the house of God forsaken?" And finding that so many carelessly regard, and openly neglect its ordinances, we may justly adopt the emphatic language of Jeremiah, (ii. 12, 13) "Be astonished, O ye heavens, at this, and be horribly afraid; be ye very desolate, saith the Lord; for my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and have hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water." For it is from the sanctuary that the healing, life-giving, and life-sustaining waters of salvation are described as flowing. See Ezek. xlvii. 1. 8, 9. 12. And few subjects more strikingly exhibit the awful alienation of man's heart from his God, and afford juster ground of complaint, or deeper cause of regret, than the wilful neglect of the public means of grace. For, by such conduct, men not only deprive themselves of their richest blessings, but plunge themselves in guilt here, and expose themselves to ruin hereafter.

The inquiry in our text, therefore, is one of deep and vital importance; nor does it merely concern such of us as are in the habit of neglecting, or are in danger of becoming neglectful of public worship; but, remembering the extent and binding obligation of that command, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself;" among the details of which we find, "Thou shalt in anywise rebuke thy neighbour, and not suffer sin upon him;" (Lev. xix. 17,) it surely becomes all who feel a concern for the glory of God, and the salvation of man, not merely to ascertain, and lament, the naked and melancholy fact, that the house of God is forsaken by numbers, but to warn and guard others against this evil, as well as watch against the first appearance of it in themselves.

In the humble and prayerful hope of leading some to a more diligent and profitable attendance upon the sanctuary, and inducing such as feel an interest in its services to seek, in some measure, to correct the errors, and inform the minds, of those who will not come to hear for themselves, I feel desirous of directing your attention to the following subjects:—

I.—A CONSIDERATION OF THE REASONS COMMONLY ALLEGED FOR THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

II.—AN ENQUIRY INTO THE REAL CAUSES OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

III.—THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

IV.—A VIEW OF THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC

WORSHIP, THE MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO ITS OBSERVANCE, AND THE SPIRIT IN WHICH ITS SERVICES OUGHT TO BE ATTENDED.

V.—THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH RENDER AN ATTENDANCE UPON THE SERVICES OF THE SANCTUARY UNPROFITABLE.

We must confine our consideration, on the present occasion, to the REASONS ALLEGED for the neglect complained of in our text. That the house of God is, to a fearful extent, forsaken, requires no argument to prove: we need but look around us, and we shall be furnished with abundant evidence of the fact. And surely it is matter of surprise, as well as regret, that so many, professing a belief in the inspired word of God, should live in the habitual neglect of an acknowledged ordinance of God. For, observe, we are not addressing ourselves to those who deny the authority of God's holy word; or enquiring why the infidel forsakes the house of God? He has avowedly rejected the counsel of God, and openly turned his back upon his ordinances. But, we ask, why multitudes of a professing Christian community, should neglect what is admitted to be a divine appointment—an appointment the most reasonable, wise, and gracious; designed for the highest, and holiest, and happiest purposes—the means of planting and building up the church of Christ—essential to preserve the fear of God in our land—essential, we might say, to maintain the very profession of christianity itself

— certainly necessary to sustain, and extend, the reality and vital power of that profession?

I. Various reasons are alleged for this neglect, which, though futile in themselves, deserve to be noticed. The first to which we shall advert, is the following: "WHAT IS THE USE OF GOING, WHEN WE SEE SO MANY ATTEND THE HOUSE OF GOD WITHOUT PROFIT?" As this plea is so very common (probably from the circumstance that it is available to all who wish for a pretext for their neglect), it demands a deliberate and attentive examination. First, let us understand its import, for individuals differ in their manner of stating it. "Because many attend the house of God without profit, therefore there is no use of our going"—or, because others attend who are no better than we are, it is not necessary we should go—or, because some ungodly men frequent the house of God, and still continue to live in their ungodly practices, therefore we ought not to go, or at least, we have a sufficient excuse for absenting ourselves. This is the substance and import of this general plea for the neglect of public worship.

Now, while I admit the fact, that many do attend the house of God without profit, I deliberately appeal to your judgment, and ask you, Does this circumstance afford you a reasonable, or scriptural, warrant for absenting yourselves from the public means of grace? Does common sense dictate or sanction such a line of conduct? Are the acknowledged rules of human action regulated or bounded by such a mode of reasoning? Or, do

those who assign and act upon this principle, in regard to the house of God, act upon the same principle with regard to their worldly avocations? What would be the evident result if such a line of conduct were adopted with regard to our worldly pursuits? All the business of life would be suspended, and all the ends and purposes of life would be defeated. There would be an end to all government,—the trade and commerce of our country must cease — our various professions must be abandoned — our agriculturists must suspend their labours — life itself could not be sustained, and the very conveniences and civilities of life must be renounced, if men were to say, we will refrain from such pursuits and employments as have not invariably yielded advantage to all who have engaged in them; shew us engagements from which all are deriving profit, and in these we will embark, and in no others. We ask, where could such be found? They exist not among men: no, not from the highest stations of royalty to the lowest and meanest occupations amongst men. Are our kings and queens then to say, we will not ascend the throne, and sway the destinies of kingdoms, because others have attempted to do so without profit to themselves or advantage to others? Are our senators and patriots to say, we will no longer plead for our country's good, and seek to preside over and direct her interests, because others have failed in their attempts, or have employed the influence of power, and assumed the garb of patriotism, to

effect their own selfish ends, and have, at length, inflicted lasting injury on themselves and others?

It is needless to apply this principle further, to the various professions, trades, and employments of men, which they do not refrain from engaging in and pursuing, because some have reaped no advantage from them. The principle is so glaringly absurd, when applied to our worldly affairs, that I should seem to be trifling with your time, and insulting your judgments, by further enlargement upon it. It is clear men reason otherwise, on points connected with their temporal interest; they do not refuse to engage in and pursue objects which may yield advantage, because some have derived no benefit from them.

The question then is—is the principle less applicable to our worldly than to our spiritual avocations? Far otherwise is the fact. It is much more applicable to the former than to the latter; or, in other words, the plea would have some force when considered with regard to our temporal concerns, but none whatever when urged for the neglect of public worship.

For this simple and obvious reason, that the commonly acknowledged maxim, “the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use,” must be received with considerable limitations when applied to subjects of mere human contrivance, of comparatively little use, and liable to much serious abuse; but no limitation whatever can be set to it, when the subject is purely a divine appointment. No argument can then be drawn from its

abuse against its use, for that would be obviously setting up our own judgment against the Lord's, questioning the wisdom of the appointer, and arraigning the Almighty at the bar of human opinion. And it is a remarkable and awful feature in man's history, that while he generally admits and acts under the impression "that the abuse of a thing is no argument against its use," he is ever ready to found an argument against the use of any scriptural subject, from its apparent abuse; and, as in the case before us, to neglect public worship, because it is not attended with profit to all who engage in its services. So blind is man to his spiritual interest, and so eager is he to embrace any plea which will sanction his living in forgetfulness of God and neglect of his ordinances.

It remains for us, briefly to notice the unscriptural character of this plea; for, if it affords any just ground for the neglect of the public ordinances of religion, it affords equal ground for the neglect of religion itself; for all the blessings of salvation have not only proved unprofitable to many to whom they were offered, but actually injurious. Christ, the Father's richest gift, is the cause of condemnation to thousands—the gospel is a savour of death unto death, as well as of life unto life, and its leading doctrines have been, by some, abused and perverted. Shall we, then, reject the counsel of God against ourselves, and "count ourselves unworthy of eternal life?" We would answer to all such cavils, as St. Paul did to *one* such, "God forbid."

But there are some particulars which I would wish to submit to the consideration of such persons. First, that though many attend the services of the sanctuary without profit, it is not the case with all who attend. Many can bear testimony to the benefit they have derived from the public means of grace, and can truly say, "A day in thy courts is better than a thousand. I had rather be a door-keeper in the house of my God, than to dwell in the tents of wickedness." And concerning many of those who are adorning the doctrine of God their Saviour in all things, we can point to the house of God and say, "This and that man was born there."

Again, it is admitted, that there are many among the regular attendants on public worship, whose conduct may be at least no better than that of those who absent themselves from it; few will maintain that any really good men will be found voluntarily renouncing this reasonable and delightful service.

By absenting yourselves, therefore, from the house of God, where all the good attend, you openly separate yourselves from those, and become enrolled among, and identified with, the neglecters of public worship, whom we confidently affirm, taken as a body, are the worst of all classes of the community. Is this, dear friends, the position you wish to occupy in society? Do you wish to appear before God and man enrolled among those who slight the sanctuary and forsake its services, or will you do so because some attend

without profit, or act inconsistently with their profession? We ask, will the profitless attendance of others upon the public means of grace screen you from the guilt of neglecting them? Will their guilt and ruin palliate or avert yours? Why, then, will you allow the conduct of others to rob you of your richest blessings and highest privileges, when the reason you allege is so utterly groundless and palpably absurd, condemned by every dictate of sound reason, common sense, and the express declarations of God's holy word?

II. A second reason for not attending public worship is closely connected with the preceding. "THERE IS NO USE OF GOING UNLESS WE ARE GOOD, IT WILL ONLY INCREASE OUR RESPONSIBILITY AND AGGRAVATE OUR GUILT."

Much of what we have said on the preceding topic applies with equal force to this; for evidently we are not at liberty to question the propriety and utility of attending God's appointed means of grace. This is arrogating to ourselves the province of judges, instead of implicitly obeying God's command of reverencing his sanctuary, and attending his ordinances. Besides, the plea itself is utterly fallacious. For, if we are to absent ourselves from the house of God because we are not *good*, are we likely to become *better* by so doing? Is it not clear, that the longer we neglect the means appointed by God for our recovery or improvement, the worse we shall become? And as to increasing our responsibilities by attending, we ask, do they diminish by our neglecting the

outward forms of religion? If we attempt to escape from the responsibility which rests upon public worshippers, we incur the more fearful responsibility of voluntarily neglecting an appointed ordinance of God. Besides, we shall have to answer for the example we set in this respect. Surely, then, such a line of conduct cannot reasonably be adopted under the notion of not increasing our responsibility and aggravating our guilt.

III. A third reason alleged for the neglect of public worship, is supposed to supply the place of the public means of grace, and avert the consequences of their neglect. "WE CAN READ AND PRAY AT HOME."

This plea demands a most serious examination. For while there is a degree of plausibility about it, it is most unscriptural in its character, and most dangerous in its tendency. But as we can more clearly shew this to be the case, when we come to treat of the consequences of slighting the public ordinances of God, we shall defer the full consideration of it until then. At present, I would ask, are we at liberty to dictate to our Judge, and assert that by the use of the private means of grace, we can obtain the end He designs to be accomplished by the use of the public means of grace. Not only were private prayer and study never designed to supersede public prayers and instruction; but by neglecting the latter, on the plea of employing the former, we are taking the surest method of rendering private reading and

prayer unprofitable, and thus depriving ourselves of the advantages of both. "For private prayer is designed to prepare us for, and not excuse us from, attending public prayer." And God has wisely ordained that the advantages of the public and private means of grace, should, in a great measure, depend upon the use and improvement of each other. So that in proportion as we diligently employ and improve the one, are we prepared for the due performance and improvement of the other; and in proportion as we neglect the one, are we disqualified for performing the duties, and enjoying the privileges, of the other. I feel the truth of this observation will commend itself to your judgment, and be readily admitted by all who are not strangers to experimental piety. And I am fully persuaded, were the subject inquired into, it would be found, that those who absent themselves from the services of the sanctuary, upon the plea that "they can read and pray at home," are not the most diligent in employing those means of grace, and certainly not those who profit most by them.

Quoted
from
Whom?

IV. A fourth reason alleged for the neglect of public worship, is this—"AFTER SIX DAYS LABOUR, WE REQUIRE A DAY OF REST."

We fully admit, that after the busy pursuits and employments of the week, a day's rest is most needful and salutary; and we would adore the goodness of God for so wise and gracious an appointment. But we maintain, that by absenting ourselves from the house of God, we deprive our-

selves of the choicest blessings of the Sabbath, and prostrate the great end for which it was designed; not merely as a day of rest, but a day of holy rest, a season of spiritual repose; the pledge and earnest of an eternal rest. And if you examine the Word of God, you will find that the observance of the Sabbath is frequently enforced in connexion with attendance on the services of the sanctuary—that by them the special design of the Sabbath is promoted, and its special blessings dispensed.

Did attendance on the services of the sanctuary require a considerable measure of toil and labour, we are bound by the imperative law of duty to attend. We are constrained by the strongest motives of gratitude, “to lift up our hands in the sanctuary, and bless the Lord.” And every motive of self-interest should induce us to frequent the house of God; for there God has promised to meet and bless his people. The combined influence of these considerations should constrain us to attend public worship, whatever labour it might impose upon us. But when the nature and length of the services are considered, I confess I feel more disposed to lament over the state of those who urge such a plea for their neglect, than to reason with them as to its weakness.

Are you aware, dear brethren, that by assigning such a cause for your neglect of the services of the sanctuary, you betray ignorance of their nature, and a want of relish for their enjoyment; and afford melancholy and decisive evidence of

unfitness for the services of the sanctuary above; and that, dying in such a state, you must necessarily be excluded from all participation in them?

And allow me further to ask you, Who enjoy their sabbaths most, the neglecters or frequenters of God's house? Who look forward with the greatest pleasure to the approaching sabbath? Who rise on the sabbath morning with the most lively anticipations of a happy and a peaceful day of rest? To whom does it yield most refreshment and satisfaction? Need I answer these questions? I feel confident that your own impressions are, that the spiritual worshippers of God enjoy their sabbaths most, even those who reverence his sanctuary, and go up "to the house of God with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that keep holyday."

O, then, that you were wise, that you would consider your latter end; that you would attend to the things that belong to your peace, before they are hid from your eyes.

V. A fifth reason for the neglect of public worship is of a very different nature from the preceding, and necessarily confined to one class of the community — THE POOR. THEIR PLEA IS POVERTY, OR THE WANT OF DECENT CLOTHING IN WHICH THEY CAN ATTEND.

I desire to enter upon the consideration of this subject with the most tender regard to the feelings of that class to whom I now especially address myself. Indeed, every dictate of humanity, as well as christianity, should guard us against

unnecessarily wounding their feelings ; and should any of the observations I shall offer appear harsh, they may be assured they are dictated by the kindest feelings toward them, and the best wishes for their present and eternal welfare.

It is most painful to every christian mind, to find the poor, to whom the gospel is specially sent, and designed to relieve them from their pressing anxieties, and to compensate for their privations here below, making their poverty the plea for absenting themselves from the house of God, where the gospel is proclaimed, and its blessings dispensed. Painful, indeed, it would be, to think that they were debarred from the privileges and blessings, of the sanctuary ; but it is far more painful to find them depriving themselves of these blessings by alleging what I am compelled, from the following reasons, to believe are chiefly mere excuses, or, at the most, only temptations to absent themselves.

First. I never knew one of whose piety I felt satisfied in other respects, who allowed their poor apparel to detain them from the house of God.

Secondly. It is a clearly ascertained, and well authenticated fact, that in the majority of cases, where want of clothing has been assigned as a reason for not attending public worship, after the necessary articles have been supplied, in a short time the individuals have relapsed into their former habits of neglect, and have even become more confirmed in them than ever. This is a subject much to be lamented, not only on account

of the individuals themselves, but because it tends to paralyze the arm of benevolence; and thus the innocent suffer with the guilty. And here I would just hint, to such persons as have been in the habit of distributing to the necessities of the poor, that it would be well to select, as the objects of their bounty, such as have been in the habit of attending the house of God, and whose poverty may now prove an obstacle, rather than those who may bring forth this excuse with the hope of gaining some temporal advantage.

Thirdly. While I admit that there may be extreme cases of poverty, when the necessary articles of clothing cannot be procured, I would propose the following as a simple test, whether the want of decent clothing is a sufficient reason for absenting ourselves from the house of God. How many, for want of decent apparel, absented themselves from those feasts so generally provided to celebrate the coronation of our most gracious Queen? * I was rejoiced to see so many of my poorer brethren present on such an occasion, and to know or hear of none who were detained from want of clothing; but happier still should I be, to see them present in the sanctuary, and to know that none were absent. It may be replied to this, that there was a strong inducement to attend those festivities. I admit it, and only regret that the stronger inducements to attend the house of God are not felt; for then

* This Sermon was preached shortly after the Coronation of Queen Victoria.

want of decent clothing would not be pleaded for its neglect.

As, notwithstanding the futility of this reason, poverty will still be assigned by many as a cause of the neglect of public worship, I will venture to affirm, that in the majority of cases where it is urged, their extreme poverty has been brought on by their own conduct. Neither the objects or limits of this discourse admit of my explaining or proving the correctness of this statement; but I would simply put it to the consciences of such, and ask them, have they not plunged themselves in poverty by their slothfulness, improvidence, or guilty habits? If poverty be a cause of the neglect of the public means of grace, then we have an additional motive to avoid its fruitful sources, which the Word of God clearly states, and strongly warns us against. "The drunkard and the glutton shall come to poverty; and drowsiness shall clothe a man with rags." Prov. xxiii. 21. But, I beseech you, if these or any other causes have reduced any of you to poverty, let not your humble garb prevent your attending upon the services of the sanctuary; or you will fatally verify in your own experience the truth of the proverb, "The destruction of the poor is their poverty."

We have now, dear brethren, stated and examined the reasons generally alleged for the neglect of public worship. And if, upon examination, they appear to us so vain and futile, what will be the result when they are weighed in the

balance of the sanctuary, "when judgment shall be laid to the line and righteousness to the plummet?" Oh remember, I implore you, the warning of our Lord, when those to whom he sent a gracious invitation made excuses; they were eternally debarred from the blessings they had slighted.

In conclusion, I would wish to impress upon your minds, that the *reasons which are alleged* for the neglect of the sanctuary are not the *real causes*; and that the real causes (which, with the Lord's permission, we propose considering in our next discourse,) are rarely assigned, and for the most part overlooked. I do not say that this is invariably the case; for there are circumstances assigned for not attending public worship, which do afford sufficient apology, such as illness, bodily or mental infirmity, attendance upon the sick, the charge of a young family, not being masters of our own time. These, and various other particulars, which it is needless to specify, may actually prevent our attending. But as these hindrances differ, in degree, from a slight obstacle to an actual impossibility of attending the services of the sanctuary, and as we have just reason to fear, that many obstacles are yielded to which might be overcome, I would submit to your consideration the following simple questions.

Do you suffer nothing but the claims of absolute necessity to detain you from the house of God? Are you really anxious to attend, and is your detention a subject of regret? Do you gladly embrace every opportunity of joining in the wor-

ship of God, and endeavour to make such arrangements as will admit of your attending Divine service, at least on the Lord's day? If you cannot answer these questions in the affirmative, you have reason to fear that difficulties are yielded to which might be overcome; and that what you deem an obstacle to your coming here, is only a strong temptation to absent yourselves. We are abundantly borne out in the truth of this observation, however unfair or harsh it may appear, from the fact, that while numbers assign various hindrances to their attending public worship, we find comparatively few absent whose hearts are really engaged in the services of the sanctuary.

O, remember, dear friends, the means of grace are fast passing away from us, and the solemn day of reckoning approaching. Before the summer is over, and the harvest is past, employ the means of grace—and may they lead you to that Saviour whom to know is life eternal, and whom to serve is perfect freedom; and unto that kingdom which is righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost. *Amen.*

SERMON II.

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE REAL CAUSES OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

NEHEMIAH xiii. 11.

“WHY IS THE HOUSE OF GOD FORSAKEN?”

IN a preceding discourse we stated and examined the reasons which are generally alleged for the neglect of public worship, and saw that, with very little exception, they were groundless excuses, affording no reasonable plea or scriptural warrant for forsaking the services of the sanctuary. And I am firmly persuaded, the more closely they are examined, the more evident it will appear, that they are adopted rather as pretexts, than acted upon as causes, for forsaking the house of God. I do not mean to imply that this is done knowingly and wilfully, with a wish to impose upon others, or that they are not the means of detaining some from the house of God, and confirming them in their habits of neglect; but I believe they are generally adopted and pleaded

after the individuals have fallen into habits of neglect—after they have lost all inclination to attend—after the mind has, by a fatal consistency, become blinded to the utility of public worship—then, and not till then, are they pleaded as motives for not attending upon the ordinances of religion. And I am persuaded, that were there no other causes for the neglect of public worship than those which are alleged, our congregations would be much more numerous than they now are.

We now proceed to enquire into the REAL CAUSES “why the house of God is forsaken?”

I. The first to which we shall advert is IGNORANCE—IGNORANCE OF RELIGION IN GENERAL, AND IGNORANCE OF THE NATURE AND DESIGN OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN PARTICULAR. To remove these evils is an object worthy of the most strenuous Christian efforts. To endeavour, in some degree, to correct the latter, is the design of these discourses, as well as to induce a diligent attendance upon the public means of grace, whereby the former may be remedied. For while such ignorance exists, we must expect to find the house of God forsaken and its ordinances slighted. As we further proceed to examine into the real causes of its neglect, and point out the utility of public worship, we hope this design will be apparent, and our instructions, through the blessing of God, rendered useful to our poorer and less educated brethren, for whom they are in this respect principally intended.

II. A second cause of the neglect of public worship is **INDIFFERENCE**. This cause of neglect is confined to no one class, but pervades all classes and ranks. It is not the mere produce of ignorance, but is founded in the corruption of our nature. It mainly springs from three sources,

First. The secret infidelity of the heart. Many, without openly rejecting the word of God, through the secret influence of an evil heart of unbelief, indulge in such trains of thought and modes of reasoning, as tend to produce unconcern about their souls, and indifference about the means of grace. Scripture repeatedly warns us against such a state, and forcibly describes it in the following passages—Zephaniah i. 12—where God declares that “He will punish the men that are settled on their lees, that say in their hearts, The Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil.” In Job xxi. 14, 15, the same class of men are described as saying unto God, “Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways.” And immediately after, demanding “What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?” And in Malachi iii. 14, they are charged by God with saying, “It is vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?” Few, indeed, will openly avow such sentiments as these, who, nevertheless, secretly maintain them, and act under their influence, and the result is, unconcern about their souls and

indifference about the means of grace. That such sentiments, if indulged and cherished, produce indifference to the public duties of religion, will appear evident by considering, that they necessarily deprive us of the powerful influences of hope and fear, which are the great inducements to engage in the service of God. The hope of obtaining good, and the fear of incurring evil, are some of the strongest motives to attend divine ordinances, and it is clear that if, through the secret influence of an evil heart of unbelief, we infer, or begin to suspect, "that the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil:" such suppositions will deprive us of their influence; for what is the object of hope? Good in expectation. Now, if there is no good looked for, or expected, in the services of the sanctuary, there is no object to excite or call forth hope, hence its influence will not lead us to attend. Again, what is the object of fear? Some evil apprehended. Now, if there is no evil apprehended by the neglect of public worship, if we think the Lord will not do evil, there is no object to excite alarm, or call forth fear, hence its influence will not urge us to attend.

I press the consideration of this subject upon your attention, for in proportion as we are deprived of the influence of hope and fear, in regard to our spiritual concerns, shall we fall into *indifference* about our souls and the probable neglect of divine ordinances, or, at least, we shall attend from much lower and very inferior motives.

You will perceive and feel the truth and force of this observation, if you will reflect for a moment on what it is that gives life and energy to men, in all their worldly pursuits and occupations. What are the powerful springs of human action? What governs and regulates mankind in their worldly plans and projects? Whether we cast our eyes around us, or turn our thoughts inward, we shall find, that the influences of hope and fear are the secret springs of our actions, and the governing motives of our lives. Is a coming good to be obtained, and is there any prospect of success? hope immediately springs up, and stimulates and sustains us in pursuing it. Is a coming evil foreseen or apprehended? fear is immediately called forth, and urges us to avoid or avert it. These form the motives to human activity; these are the springs which set mankind in motion.

Now, the hopes and fears which concern spiritual and eternal things, are designed to exercise the same commanding influence over the believer's mind with regard to things unseen and eternal, as the hopes and fears which concern worldly and temporal things exercise over mens' minds with regard to the things that are seen and temporal. Deprive man of the influences of hope and fear in his worldly pursuits, and you deprive him of the springs of human action, and paralyse his efforts. Deprive the professor of religion of the influences of hope and fear, and you deprive him of the springs of spiritual action; you paralyse his energies, and leave him with-

out a motive to avoid the evil and obtain the good.

Now, as the secret infidelity of the heart tends directly to deprive us of the influence of hope and fear, and thus produce **INDIFFERENCE** about the means of grace, I beseech you, brethren, to pause and consider if unbelief reigns in your hearts, or if you have secretly adopted the sentiments so emphatically described and strongly condemned in the passages to which I have referred. Depend upon it, the secret supposition that "the Lord will not do good, neither will he do evil," will produce spiritual indifference; and oh! remember, that the *root of the evil* which operates so powerfully in detaining us from the house of God, and blinds us to the fatal effects of its neglect, is deeply seated in our hearts, and that nothing short of the grace of God can eradicate it, or restrain its power.

unconverted A second source of this indifference is, *the disrelish for spiritual things which is felt by man in his unrenewed state*. This doubtless has a powerful effect upon many, for man is in a great degree led by his inclinations and feelings, and these always tend towards what yield pleasure and satisfaction; and, finding no pleasure or enjoyment in religion, he feels indifferent about its services.

And need we any proof, brethren, that this disrelish for spiritual things exists to a fearful extent? If we look to the great bulk of mankind, the whole tenor of their life and conversation

bespeaks, not only indifference about their souls, and disregard of God's glory, but an actual dislike and disrelish for spiritual subjects. And if we turn our thoughts inward, and enquire why we are so backward to engage in the service of God; why we find the duties of the sanctuary rather a tiresome and irksome task, than a privilege and a source of enjoyment; why we are so cold and lifeless in our devotions, so wandering and distracted in our minds? is it not because we have no relish for those spiritual services, and, like the Israelites of old, we loath the spiritual manna, for want of a renewed taste to enjoy it? Oh! remember, dear brethren, that if a disrelish for spiritual things has disqualified you for performing the duties and enjoying the privileges of the sanctuary *below*, the same disrelish will disqualify you for the services and blessings of the sanctuary *above*, and must necessarily exclude you from all participation in them. And I beseech you, be careful how you yield to your disinclination to attend the public ordinances of religion; for by so doing you will increase your disrelish for spiritual things, and render your indifference more profound.

A third source of this indifference is *pride*. "The wicked," says the psalmist, "through the *pride* of their countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all their thoughts."

In assigning ignorance as a cause of the neglect of public worship, we confined it chiefly to the lower classes; and in assigning pride as a cause of spiritual indifference, and consequent disregard

of public worship, we would consider it as chiefly applicable to the higher classes. "And it is somewhat remarkable," as has been wisely and forcibly observed, "that here the extremes meet,

and that the public duties of religion are most slighted by the highest and by the lowest classes of society; by the former, I fear, from indolence and pride, by the latter, from ignorance and profligacy." When many of the first description do attend, it is in such a manner as makes it evident they esteem it merely an act of condescension, to which they submit as an example to their inferiors, who, penetrating their design, imitate their indifference rather than their devotion. Could, the rich and the noble be prevailed upon to attend to the instructions of their Lord, instead of making their elevated rank a reason for neglecting their duties, they would learn that there are none to whom they are so necessary, since there are none whose situation is so perilous, whose responsibility is so great, and whose salvation is so arduous.

It may here naturally be asked, if we assign indifference (springing from *any*, or the combined influence of *all*, the sources we stated) as a cause of the neglect of public worship, how are we to account for the fact, that many attend the external duties of religion who, apparently, are profoundly indifferent about the great concerns of eternity; who manifest little anxiety about their souls or God's glory, and have, apparently, no relish for spiritual things. Their conduct in the house of

God frequently affords melancholy proof that their hearts are not engaged in its services — the whole tenor of their lives declares them to be strangers to experimental piety, and manifest religion to be neither their element or their delight. If some, then, attend the house of God who are indifferent about spiritual things, and whose indifference may be traced to the same sources as the indifference of those who neglect its services, how are we to explain or account for the difference of their outward conduct? They agree as to their state of mind and disposition of heart, and yet differ so widely in their conduct; some attending, others neglecting, the outward forms of public worship. What mainly constitutes this difference is — **THE POWER OF HABIT, AND THE FORCE OF THE EXAMPLE AND OPINION OF OTHERS.** This we assign, and proceed to consider,

III. AS A THIRD CAUSE OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

This subject demands our most serious attention; for, while the power of habit, and the force of example and opinion, are constantly exercising over us a powerful and almost inconceivable influence, we are, for the most part, unconscious of it, and pay but slight attention to the fact.

Habit becomes to man almost a second nature. He is the slave of habit — it binds him with adamant chains, leading him as a captive, to the daily performance of what he has been accustomed, and to the neglect of what he has hitherto slighted; it makes his past history the model for

his future, supplying him with power from the performance of past acts, for the performance of future acts of the same kind, and rendering him, by past neglect, more averse to engage in, and less able to perform, what he has hitherto neglected.

Though the influence of habit has been, for the most part, imperceptibly gained, and is unconsciously exercised over us, yet, who that compares his past with his present state, can fail to discover that habit has gained, and is constantly exercising over him, a most commanding influence? What is it that has rendered that which was once felt to be difficult and irksome, now easy and pleasant; so that what once required much exertion, is now performed without the feeling of an effort? Simply the power of habit.

And what is it that has rendered what was once felt to be easy and pleasant, now so difficult and irksome? The habit of neglect. You may find a common instance of this, in the simple circumstance of postponing from day to day to call upon a friend, or write a letter, which renders what might have been an agreeable employment, at length an irksome or toilsome task.

Our present and immediate enquiry is, how far does the power of habit tend to thin our congregations? The power of habit is clearly acquired—it is not natural to us—it is a consequence of past conduct. Habits of attendance upon divine ordinances have been formed by attendance—habits of neglect have been formed by past neg-

lect. But the habit of the neglect of public worship is not merely a consequence of past neglect, but, when formed, it becomes a powerfully increasing and perpetuating cause of future neglect.

A question, then, of solemn and fearful import is here suggested—how was this guilty habit first formed? Parents, can you answer the question, and acquit yourselves of blame respecting your children? Have you availed yourselves of the ease and pliancy of youth, to mould and form their character to strict attendance upon the duties of the sanctuary? Have you endeavoured early to impress their minds with reverence for its ordinances, and to direct their youthful steps to God's holy temple? Oh! how melancholy and heart-rending is the fact, that parents should not only neglect to bring or send their children to the house of God, but should, moreover, by their example, and by, perhaps, their unguardedly expressed *opinions* in their hearing, practically train them in the path they have themselves chosen: and thus the seeds of neglect, which have been sown in youth by the example and opinion of the parent, become strengthened and confirmed in manhood, by the example and opinion of others; while the habit of slighting public worship, which originated in the guilt of the parent, involves the child in fresh guilt, and will, in all human probability, plunge both parent and child in utter and irremediable ruin. And if scripture lead us to infer, that the

last look forward with fearful anticipations to their friends and relatives entering the abodes of misery, with what dreadful forebodings must the lost parent look forward to the fate of that child whom he failed to train up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and whom his example and opinions first led to the neglect of public worship. Oh! what mind can conceive, or words express, how the reproaches of the child must sound in the ear, and rankle in the breast, of the parent, to whose guilty neglect, and fatal example, he ascribes his eternal misery.

And when we reflect upon the vast multitudes who are guilty of such conduct, unless the All-wise Disposer of events had devised means to prevent the formation, or break the fatal spell of such guilty habits, and to counteract the contagion of evil example and opinion, no Christian mind could look forward without alarm to what must be the result of the combined influence of the example and opinion of parents upon the rising generation.

Thank God, means have been devised, and called into active operation, which are admirably adapted to accomplish these ends. Such are the effects of our Sunday schools; and had they no other claim upon our regard, than that of bringing our children to the house of God, it would be sufficient to commend them to our judgment, and to endear them to our hearts; and no class of the community more justly deserve the warmest

thanks of their country, than the Sunday school teachers of our land.

It may here occur to the minds of some anxious parents, that they have known children who have been brought up in strict attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, and whom both the example and precept of their parents should have rendered regular attenders upon its ordinances, who have, notwithstanding, become habitual neglecters of public worship. That there are many such melancholy cases cannot be denied; but that such is neither the natural or general result of such treatment will appear, if we enquire who are, for the most part, the attendants on, and who are the neglecters of, public worship. Experience confirms the truth of the promise, "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." And while we act under the simple but firm impression, that "duties are ours, and events are God's," we shall find abundant encouragement to persevere in training youth in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and in attendance upon his ordinances. At the same time, we shall find sufficient to convince us of the frailty of human nature, and lead us earnestly to implore the renewing and preserving grace of Him, "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy," and to render us watchful over our own conduct with respect to Divine service; remembering, "that children receive impressions from their parents, which, in a great measure, form

their character, and abide with them through life."

Before I dismiss the consideration of this subject, I would wish to impress upon your minds the urgent necessity, both with respect to yourselves and your children, of strict watchfulness against the first causes of neglecting the public service of God; as every act of neglect will weaken the power of habit in this respect, and tend to counteract the influence of our general example and opinions. We say, the *first* causes of neglect, for it will almost invariably be found, that where individuals have become neglecters of public worship, who had been regular attendants, they became so without any wilful determination of forsaking the house of God, and that it was occasioned by some comparatively trivial circumstance in the first instance.

This is a subject of vast importance and demands a more particular consideration.

IV. We shall therefore assign, as a **FOURTH CAUSE OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP, SOME COMPARATIVELY TRIVIAL CIRCUMSTANCES, LEADING TO OCCASIONAL OMISSION, AND ENDING IN HABITUAL NEGLECT.** Our enquiry now is—How those who were once regular attendants have become habitual neglecters of divine ordinances.

Few, very few, of those who have been accustomed to attend the house of God, have at once openly turned their back upon its ordinances. Gradually and imperceptibly has the habit been broken through, until, from being numbered

among regular public worshippers, they have degenerated into carelessness, and have at length been ranked among those who openly slight the sanctuary. And we venture to affirm, in the majority of such cases, not only that there was no intention of adopting such a course, but that the final result was never anticipated, and that this melancholy change might be traced to some trivial occurrence. Some small temptation to neglect public worship presented itself, and was yielded to—some domestic arrangement, occasional visitor, or slight obstacle, was allowed, in the first instance, to detain them; a chain of circumstances followed from this single act of compliance, which eventually caused what was only an occasional omission to become a confirmed practice. I shall not stop to trace the various steps of this downward course, but would simply observe, that persons become neglecters of divine ordinances from such trivial causes, without any intention or remote expectation of the final issue, because every temptation that is yielded to, renders us less able and less inclined to resist, and gives birth to other temptations, to which we should never have been exposed, had we not yielded to the first. For the truth of these observations, we might confidently appeal to the experience of those who have been led to the complete omission of the public means of grace, and we should find an awful confirmation in the testimony of their consciences. And could we learn the causes which have seduced them from the

paths of peace, they would stand as a warning to professors, not to allow slight obstacles to detain them from the duties of the sanctuary, or yield to temptations to absent themselves; for by these many religious professors have been led away from the solemn assembly of the saints, and are now numbered among the congregation of the dead. I shall just state a single instance, in confirmation and illustration of these remarks.

I was requested, some years ago, to call upon an individual who had been for some time actively engaged in the dissemination of infidel publications, and who had been the cause of much evil in his neighbourhood. I found him, apparently, one of the most hopeless and reckless of our race. In the course of conversation he informed me, that he had been a regular attendant upon public worship, (which I ascertained to have been the case,) and that the cause of his turning his back upon the house of God, and of his finally renouncing the profession of christianity, arose from the circumstance of his being late one sabbath when going to his place of worship, and, finding the service had commenced, he resolved to return home; and, although five and twenty years had elapsed from that period, he never entered any place of worship.

This may be regarded as a solitary and remarkable instance; but rest assured, that almost equally trivial occurrences, though not attended with such fearful results, are the cause of many regular frequenters becoming habitual neglecters of the house of God.

While on this subject, I would for a moment advert to some trifling circumstances, which lead to a more deliberate neglect of public worship than those to which we have alluded, and which may be found in most congregations of the land. I mean grounds of offence, either at something the minister has said and done, or a dispute with some member of the congregation, or some real or imaginary wrong about a seat. I merely state these particulars, without entering upon their consideration, further than by observing, that although offence is so commony taken, it is very rarely that offence is meant. The common grounds of offence are, for the most part, imaginary; and surely, it is neither wise, or reasonable, or charitable, to take offence where none is intended. But even admitting that they did receive just grounds of offence, either from their minister or some of the congregation, is this a just cause for neglecting God's appointed means of grace? whom do they injure by such conduct, themselves or others? If their supposed offenders were actuated by an unkind spirit, they would have no cause to grieve at their neglecting public worship; and if they are grieved at seeing them slight the means of grace, it must be because they feel some concern for their spiritual welfare; and surely this should conciliate their esteem, and remove their prejudice. In whatever point of view we regard it, it appears most unwise and unchristian to allow the conduct of others, be it what it may, to detain them from the house of

God, and thus rob them of their richest blessings and highest privileges, plunge them in guilt, and expose them to the fearful consequences of such neglect.

A circumstance connected with this subject has left a deep impression on my mind. I received an earnest entreaty that I would immediately visit a dying man—he was dying of mortification, brought on by intoxication. I found him in the most fearful state of despair. All present were afflicted at his agony of mind. And when I enquired of his past life, he told me he had been a professor of religion, and had once enjoyed peace with God; that there had been a dispute among the congregation to which he belonged; that he took part in it, which ended in his separation, and neglect of public worship altogether. Shortly after his death, I called upon his wife, and solemnly urged her to take warning from what she had seen her husband endure, and attend public worship; and after setting before her the inevitable consequences of its wilful neglect, she replied—"All you say, sir, is true; but my heart is too hard for me now to attend:" nor could I prevail upon her to alter her determination.

We have now considered *four real causes* of the neglect of public worship. There are other more *direct* and *immediate* causes, which, with the Lord's permission, we shall bring before you in our next discourse.

In the mean time, dear brethren, let not our

enquiries and considerations pass off unheeded and unimproved. Let the application fall home upon each of us, remembering that we have within us an evil heart of unbelief, which will ever tempt us to depart from the living God, and furnish us with pretexts for neglecting his ordinances; and it is by blinding the understanding that the deceitfulness of the heart operates.

And may the Lord lead us to a diligent and profitable attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, and meet us, sabbath after sabbath, as we come up to worship in his holy temple, and cheer us with his presence, until we come and appear before him perfect in Mount Zion.

Amen.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and dates, which appears to be a record of some kind. The names are written in a cursive script, and the dates are in a more formal, printed style. The list is organized into two columns, with names on the left and dates on the right. The names are: John Smith, James Brown, William Jones, and Thomas White. The dates are: 1810, 1811, 1812, and 1813. The list is followed by a section of text that is also written in cursive. This text appears to be a description of the events that took place during the period covered by the list. It mentions the names of the individuals listed and describes their actions and the circumstances surrounding them. The text is written in a clear, legible hand, and it is organized into paragraphs. The first paragraph describes the events of 1810, the second paragraph describes the events of 1811, the third paragraph describes the events of 1812, and the fourth paragraph describes the events of 1813. The text is followed by a final section of text that appears to be a summary or conclusion of the document. This text is also written in cursive and is organized into a single paragraph. The document is a historical record, and it provides a detailed account of the events that took place during the period covered by the list. The names and dates are written in a cursive script, and the text is written in a clear, legible hand. The document is organized into sections, and it is easy to read and understand.

SERMON III.

AN ENQUIRY INTO THE REAL CAUSES OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

NEHEMIAH xiii. 11.

“WHY IS THE HOUSE OF GOD FORSAKEN?”

THE subject for our present consideration, is a further enquiry into the real causes “why the house of God is forsaken.” We have already stated and examined four of these causes :

I. IGNORANCE—IGNORANCE OF RELIGION IN GENERAL, AND IGNORANCE OF THE DESIGN OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IN PARTICULAR.

II. INDIFFERENCE — SPRINGING FROM THREE SOURCES : THE SECRET INFIDELITY OF THE HEART, A DISRELIISH FOR SPIRITUAL THINGS, AND PRIDE.

III. THE POWER OF HABIT, AND FORCE OF EXAMPLE AND OPINION.

IV. SOME COMPARATIVELY TRIVIAL CIRCUMSTANCES LEADING TO OCCASIONAL OMISSION, AND FINALLY ENDING IN HABITUAL NEGLECT.

V. A FIFTH CAUSE OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP, WHICH WE NOW PROCEED TO CONSIDER,

IS A LOVE OF PLEASURE, AND A SPIRIT OF INDEPENDENCE.

This is a fruitful source of neglect, especially among the young. The desire of happiness, which is so deeply implanted in our nature, and pervades the whole human race, from the monarch on his throne to the beggar in the streets, operates with especial force in the breasts of the young, who are warmer in their feelings, and more bent upon present enjoyment, than the aged.

Now, as the desire of happiness naturally leads us to those objects which we imagine will yield us pleasure, and renders us averse to what we conceive would deprive us of sources of enjoyment, it is evident that the subject of religion must often be presented to the young in a most uninviting form, as it is so frequently represented, and believed to be, a melancholy and gloomy subject. Hence the public ordinances of religion, which are in reality the ways of pleasantness and paths of peace, are eyed with a strong degree of prejudice; from the idea that they would deprive them of those gratifications on the enjoyment of which they are bent, and impose upon them restraints which they deem most irksome, and to which they are unwilling to submit.

As such views and feelings must powerfully tend to prejudice the young against religion, and restrain them from its ordinances, I desire earnestly and affectionately to address a few words on this subject to my younger brethren.

My dear young friends, I invite you seriously to examine the subject we are discussing. You wish to be happy; this is the feeling of your breasts. Your ministers wish you to be happy. We sincerely and earnestly desire your present and eternal happiness. God, the fountain and true source of happiness, wishes you to be happy. Are you then happy? Have you even obtained the measure of happiness you anticipated? Or do you suppose that religion would deprive you of your scanty measure of enjoyment, and afford you no pleasure in its place? Are these your feelings; are these your views? Now candidly examine the subject, and you will invariably find that every practice, or habit, which God prohibits, or condemns, tends to present as well as eternal misery. I speak not merely of those grosser sins which are known, and felt, and believed to bring misery in their train; and from which many are deterred from a consciousness of their effects. But, I say, every practice which God condemns, and every pleasure which he forbids, whatever momentary enjoyment they may yield, will be attended with bitterness in the end; yea, those forbidden pleasures, or amusements, which keep many from the house of God, will "at last bite like a serpent, and sting like an adder."

Again, as to the spirit of independence, which so strongly characterizes the young in our day, and renders them impatient of the restraints of religion, and thus induces many to shun the

house of God, because they do not wish to have their wills thwarted, or their inclinations opposed. Like the prodigal, who left his father's house that he might not be awed by his presence, or restrained by his government, they forsake the house of God, that they may not be awed by ministerial authority, or subjected to the restraints of religion. I beseech you, dear friends, to examine the temper which cannot brook the salutary restraints of the gospel; and you will find, not only that it bears the distinct marks of God's disapprobation, but that a love of independence among the young has always been condemned by the sense and intelligence of mankind; and, as has been justly observed, "by the unanimous consent of all ages, modesty, docility, and reverence to superior years, and to parents above all, have been considered as their appropriate virtues, — a guard assigned by the immutable laws of God and nature, on the inexperience of youth." And we have apostolical authority for recommending submission to spiritual teachers: "Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief, for that is *unprofitable* for you."

Permit me, further, to entreat you to examine the spirit the gospel inculcates, and what are the restraints it imposes. Does it in any measure deprive us of that spirit and temper which are so beneficial to ourselves, and gain the approbation

of others? The spirit the gospel inculcates is a source of the truest happiness, and our highest recommendation; so much so, that the world is led to mimic what Christianity imparts, and the highest spirit of politeness is but the counterfeit of the spirit of the gospel. And what are the restraints which religion imposes? Are they the mere arbitrary appointments of a judge, founded in the will of a sovereign, without regard to the happiness and well-being of man? No, brethren, they are the wise and gracious appointments of a merciful father, designed to exercise over man a most salutary influence, "depriving him of no pleasures that are innocent, and imposing no restraints that are capricious." The restraints of religion are not the restraints of bondage, but designed to preserve the conscience, the spirit, the affections, all free. They are restraints of heaven, to preserve us from the shackles and entanglements of earth; designed to elevate and sustain us above a world of turmoil, sin, and strife, and win us back to the high and holy enjoyments of heaven. And thus the Saviour's invitation is, "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart, and ye shall find rest unto your souls; for my yoke is easy, and my burden is light." And if we comply with such demands, and submit to such restraints, they will prove our safeguard and our defence against many an ill, and many a bitter pang; and be no more felt to be burdensome or irksome than feathers are to a bird, or the wings,

which enable it to escape from earth, and ascend toward heaven. Or, to use a more homely illustration, they will be to us what the string is to the kite, which, while it seems to bind and restrain it, in reality elevates and sustains it. And not more surely will it take a downward course, if the string be severed, than will that soul which breaks through the restraints that religion imposes.

Oh! then, dear friends, let not a love of pleasure, or a spirit of independence, detain you from the services of the sanctuary. Your best interests and truest happiness, both here and hereafter, depend upon submission to God's authority, and obedience to his laws.

VI. A SIXTH CAUSE OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IS OPEN SIN, OR A CONSCIOUSNESS OF LIVING IN THE WILFUL VIOLATION OF GOD'S LAWS, WITH A SECRET DETERMINATION OF CONTINUING IN SUCH A COURSE. This is the most formidable of all the causes of neglect, and certainly the most difficult to grapple with; it constitutes the very climax of man's guilt and danger. That such a cause detains many from the house of God, cannot admit of reasonable doubt; that such a cause is the most formidable, will appear evident, by considering the position in which such persons are placed, and the probable line of reasoning they may adopt. They may reason thus: "We are living in the wilful violation of God's laws, and while we continue in such a course of sin, we can re-

ceive no benefit from the means of grace. We cannot serve the devil in the world, and God in his holy temple. We cannot enjoy the pleasures of sin, and the peace of piety; and as we have no intention or inclination to renounce the service of Satan, or forego the pleasures of sin, there is no use of our attending the sanctuary, as we can neither perform its duties nor enjoy its blessings. Not only does such a state deprive them of the strongest motives for engaging in public worship, but they find strong inducements to absent themselves, from that spirit of guilty fear which haunts their imaginations and troubles their consciences, and which they find only increased and aggravated, by being brought into contact with the light of truth; and thus they shun the light, because their deeds are evil—yea, they hate that light which detects, exposes, and condemns their deeds of darkness.

Again, if their sins are known to be hateful, the dread of shame will operate in restraining them from engaging in the public services of religion.

You perceive, then, dear brethren, the formidable nature of this cause of the neglect of public worship. What can we, or what shall we, say to those who are detained by it from the house of God? Shall we tell them their inferences are wrong—that the means of grace will profit them, though they love and cleave to their sins? We cannot, we dare not; for there is awful truth in their inferences. Shall we tell them that those guilty fears which deter them from attending, are

groundless? We cannot, we dare not; for these are the testimony of God's truth in their consciences—the harbinger of that wrath which will be poured upon them to the uttermost, if they continue in their present career of sin.

Shall we tell them they have no reason to be ashamed of their conduct, or that there is no inconsistency between the open commission of sin, and the open profession of religion? No, brethren, we cannot; for this shame is the forerunner of that overwhelming dread which will compel the ungodly hereafter to call upon the mountains to fall upon them, and the hills to cover them from the presence of the Lamb and all his holy angels. Thus, so far, we are compelled to give an awful confirmation to the truth of their inferences, and the fatal consistency of their conduct; for there are no subjects more incompatible than the service of sin and the service of God—than the pleasures of sin and the enjoyments of piety; there is no contradiction or inconsistency more glaring, than the wilful commission of sin, and the open profession of religion.

How, then, shall we act towards such persons? Shall we leave them in their present guilty course of rebellion against God, and neglect of his ordinances? The minister of Christ must not do so. Shall we regard them as hopeless; or tell them there is no remedy for them in God? God forbid! I would rather desire, affectionately but solemnly, to reason with them before God. And

I would ask them, "Have you counted the cost; and are you prepared to abide the event of your present course of conduct? Have you deliberately resolved to barter your souls for your sins; or, feeling that the service of sin is incompatible with the service of God, have you determined to exclude yourselves from the privileges of the sanctuary below, and to forfeit all the pleasures and blessings that are at God's right hand above, for the perishable enjoyments of the world, or the short-lived pleasures of sin? Surely, brethren, you will admit, that if sin has disqualified you for performing the duties, and enjoying the privileges, of God's temple on earth, the same cause must disqualify you for the exercises, and will necessarily exclude you from the enjoyments, of that holy temple above, in which nothing that defileth can in anywise enter.

Again, if a spirit of guilty fear restrains you from the house of God, or a sense of shame deters you from joining in the public assembly of the saints, what shall be the result when you stand in your Maker's presence, when sin shall be stripped of all its false colouring, and appear in all its naked deformity; when memory shall recall that long black catalogue of sins, which you may long since have buried in oblivion, and conscience, long stifled and overpowered, shall awake, and, like the finger of God upon the wall of Belshazzar's palace, shall announce that "you are weighed in the balance and found wanting," and sting you with agonizing remorse; at a time,

too, when the only antidote for sin shall have passed away from you for ever — when no refuge shall appear, to screen you from the avenging wrath of God—when the summer is over, and the harvest is past, and you are not saved? Oh! if guilt and fear, and the dread of shame, now operate in restraining you from the public service of God, what will be the result, when you find yourselves eternally excluded from the kingdom of heaven, and consigned to dwell in everlasting burnings? If these things take place in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry? Then, indeed, shall fearfulness surprise you, when you awake to shame and everlasting contempt.

You may probably reply to these solemn warnings, “God forbid that such should be our end and portion; we do not intend continuing in our present course of conduct; we hope and trust the time will come, when we shall be able to break off our evil habits, to serve our God, and to attend his ordinances.” Pardon, I pray you, my faithfulness, and let not my plainness of speech offend you, when I ask, with what probability of success do you indulge such expectations? It is certain, that very few deliberately determine to persevere to their lives’ end in that course of conduct, which, they believe, will exclude them from the kingdom of God, and insure their eternal ruin.

The great bulk of those who are living in forgetfulness of God, and neglect of his ordinances, if they believe in a future state of rewards and punishments, more or less indulge in the hope of

escaping from the wrath to come, and obtaining peace at the last. Now, let us seriously enquire, how far they are warranted to expect such results? If we appeal to the sober dictates of reason, and find that such is the constitution of our nature, that every sin paves the way for the commission of other sins; that yielding to sin strengthens the power, and rivets the fetters of sin, and renders us less able and less inclined to resist it. Does reason warrant a probability of deliverance from that to which we are continually affording strength, while we deprive ourselves of power to resist it?

Again, if we appeal to observation and experience, and enquire how many of those who adopt the course of conduct we have described, are reclaimed in their declining years? Alas! how awful is the fact that meets us in answer to this enquiry, that few hoary heads are found worshipping God in his temple, in the case of those who have forsaken it in their youth.

And, lastly, if we appeal to a still higher testimony, even to the faithful records of truth, we find an awful confirmation of what reason suggests and experience testifies, "that the sinner is holden with the cords of his sins;" and that, "they mourn at the last, and say, I have hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof, and I have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me." See Prov. v. 11, 12, 13; and chap. i. 20—30; and chap. xxi. 16. These solemn words we give without comment; may they have their due

weight and influence over that class of the neglecters of public worship, to whom they so aptly apply.

In assigning open sin as a cause "why the house of God is forsaken," we have not specified any particular sins. Some sins, from their nature, effects, and consequences, have a more direct and powerful tendency to restrain us from engaging in the public services of religion. Before we dismiss the consideration of this subject, I would briefly advert to one sin, which is a very common, and a very powerful cause, both directly and indirectly, of the neglect of public worship—the sin of drunkenness. No sin operates more powerfully in thinning our congregations than this; for no sin is more strongly condemned by God—no sin is more reprobated by the sense and intelligence of mankind—no sin, from its effects, more directly disqualifies us for the services of the sanctuary—and no sin is attended with such a train of consequences, as supply fresh causes for this neglect; for it is the fruitful source of poverty, wretchedness, domestic misery, and discord; all of which will operate in detaining us from the service of God. Neither the design or limits of this discourse admit of our enlarging on this topic; I can only express my ardent wish and fervent prayer, that the nation may awake to the reality and extent of this evil, which fills our prisons, and thins our sanctuaries.

VII. A SEVENTH CAUSE OF THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP, TO WHICH WE WOULD

ADVERT, WE FIND EMBODIED IN A STRIKING PASSAGE IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS, xxiv. 21, 22 — “*My son, fear thou the Lord, and the king, and meddle not with them that are given to change. For their calamity shall rise suddenly; and who knoweth the ruin of them both?*” The circumstance to which I allude in this passage, as a cause “why the house of God is forsaken,” *is the spirit or love of change.*

Before I enter upon the consideration of this subject, I beg to be clearly understood, that I make no allusion whatever to any party, religious or political. I desire, simply, to point out a cause of the neglect of public worship, without any reference, even the most remote, to any political party, or to any denomination of Christians whatever. I state this distinctly, as the passage clearly has reference to the love of change, both in religion, and in the civil government; and both are causes “why the house of God is forsaken.”

Before I point out how this love of change may operate with regard to the sanctuary, permit me to give the import of the passage, as clearly expressed by the truly excellent Matthew Henry. After stating that religion and loyalty must go together, he says, “As men, it is our duty to honour our Creator, to worship and reverence him, and to be always in his fear; as members of the community incorporated for our mutual benefit, it is our duty to be faithful and dutiful to the government which God has set over us. Innova-

tions in both are to be dreaded. 'Have nothing to do,' he does not say, with them that change, for there may be cause to change for the better; but 'THAT ARE GIVEN TO CHANGE,' that affect it for change sake, out of a peevish discontent with that which is, and a fondness for novelty; meddle not with them that are given to change, either in religion, or in the civil government."

I do not intend to imply, either by quoting this passage, or the comment upon it, that it is intended to warn us against this love of change as a cause of the neglect of public worship; but having simply given the import of the passage, I shall endeavour to shew how this fondness for change may so operate.

First, as regards religion, the love of change will either lead us to change from one denomination to another, or induce us to follow new or strange preachers among the denomination to which we belong. And thus something NEW will be desired, rather than something USEFUL, and the preacher more frequently criticised than prayed for, and his statements more frequently canvassed than the duties he enforces practised. I need not say that, little utility and much evil being the result of such a course, the individuals will be deprived of strong inducements to attend; and after frequently absenting themselves from their own place of worship, upon the plea of going to hear another minister, the charm of novelty ceasing, they will be found to neglect public worship altogether.

Again, the love of change in the civil government, will operate no less powerfully in leading to this neglect, especially among the lower class. First,—Where such a fondness for change exists, information will naturally be desired and sought, respecting the favourite subject; and, as the lower classes have not much time at their disposal during the week, there will be a strong temptation to seek it on the Sabbath. Secondly,—As their limited means will not admit of their obtaining the publications which furnish it at their own homes, they will be induced to frequent those public resorts where they may be seen. And need I say that such *practices* and such *places* will lead, directly and indirectly, to the desecration of the Sabbath, and the neglect of the sanctuary? Experience and observation add melancholy confirmation to the fact.

Before we dismiss the consideration of this topic, it may be well to observe, that the admonition in this passage is not addressed to *those who are given to change*, but to those who are in danger of being injured by such characters. It is a warning to “meddle not with them that are given to change.” And the reason assigned is, “for their calamity shall rise suddenly, and who knoweth the ruin of them both?” that is, of those who *are given* to change, and those that *meddle* with them: for no class of men advance their worldly or spiritual interest less, and more frequently involve themselves and others in ruin, than those who are given to change.

VIII. THE LAST CAUSE WHICH WE ASSIGN FOR THE NEGLECT OF PUBLIC WORSHIP IS, SATANIC INFLUENCE AND AGENCY. There are few subjects of revealed truth more distinctly and repeatedly affirmed, than the existence and agency of Satan; and I believe there are few statements which exercise less practical influence over the majority of those who assent to them. The fact is generally overlooked, and even questioned, by many who profess a belief in the Word of God. And because some attribute all their faults to the agency of Satan — others, conscious of their sinfulness, and feeling they are to blame, doubt whether any such influence has been exerted over them, as if yielding to Satan freed them from the guilt of transgression; or that it was necessary to deny the extent of their corruption, or the enormity of their offences, because Satan had stirred up that corruption, and induced them to transgress. Now, if the word of God describes Satan as a powerful, subtle, and malignant foe, roving, full of rage, as a roaring lion, to tempt, to betray, to destroy us, and involve us in guilt and misery; if the extent of his deceptions are such, that it is said, "He deceiveth the whole world;" if the fall of the most eminent saints, and the ruin of the ungodly, are alike ascribed to his agency; and if his great object is to rob God of his glory, and men of their souls, then we may with certainty infer, that his utmost power, and most strenuous efforts, will be exerted to detain us from the house of God. For there God has promised

to record his name, and manifest his glory; and there the glorious truths of salvation are proclaimed, which bring "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good-will toward men," and which are specially designed for overthrowing the kingdom of Satan, and setting up the kingdom of Christ on its ruins. Satan well knows the formidable nature of divine ordinances—he knows, by past experience, that thereby many a brand has been plucked from the burning, and many of his lawful captives have been delivered from his power; that, by the preaching of the gospel, his designs have been detected and exposed, and the fatal spell by which he had long held many of his captives, had been broken. Doubtless he will, therefore, endeavour to detain us from the public means of grace, and involve us in the guilt and fatal consequences of their neglect.

And though scripture does not exactly inform us of the extent of Satan's influence, or the precise manner in which it is exerted over us, we have abundantly sufficient information for every practical purpose; and in connexion with the subject before us, we may infer, that he can employ any, or all, of the means we have stated, to detain us from the house of God; choosing the most likely, and adapting them to the temper and circumstances of the individual.

And I would suggest, dear brethren, as a powerful motive for *regular* attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, that in yielding to causes

of neglect, you may probably be yielding to an unseen agency, exercised over you for the most cruel and malignant purposes, and which may be attended with the most fatal consequences. Whereas, by resisting, or breaking through, the temptations which would detain you, you may be yielding to a higher influence, which, eventually, may be the means of rescuing you from the tyranny of Satan, and conducting you into the paths of peace and holiness; and, finally, of your obtaining an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

We have now enquired into the real causes "why the house of God is forsaken," and have seen how they operate in leading us to neglect its services. In conclusion, it may be necessary to offer a few words in explanation of a statement we have already advanced—that while the reasons which are generally alleged, for the neglect of public worship, are seldom the true causes, the real causes are rarely, if ever mentioned. The reason of this probably is, first, because the real causes of neglect are *internal*; whereas, the reasons which are alleged, for the most part, are external, and familiar to us all. A second, and a stronger reason is, because the real causes are all, more or less, founded in the guilt and corruption of our nature, and therefore cannot be urged to avert the guilt of neglecting divine ordinances; while the reasons which are alleged, not being directly founded in guilt, or, at least,

not supposed to be so founded, are urged as pretexts to screen men from the condemnation of neglecting the public services of religion.

You perceive, then, dear brethren, the vast importance of having our minds clearly informed as to the causes "why the house of God is forsaken." And we ought to feel it our duty to inform the minds of others upon this important subject, by setting before them the futility of the reasons they allege, and the guilt of the real causes which keep them from the house of God; and also point out the probable and inevitable consequences of this guilty neglect. To this latter subject your attention will again be invited. May the Lord, in the multitude of his mercies, lead us to the diligent use and improvement of the public means of grace, and sustain and animate us in them, with the blessed hope of eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

SERMON IV.

THE CONSEQUENCES OF NEGLECTING PUBLIC WORSHIP.

HEBREWS x. 25.

“NOT FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLING OF OURSELVES
TOGETHER, AS THE MANNER OF SOME IS.”

THERE is a simple and forcible exhibition of the exercise of that wisdom which is profitable to direct, recorded in the book of Proverbs xxii. 3—“A prudent man foreseeth the evil, and hideth himself: but the simple pass on, and are punished.” Whether we regard the evil here alluded to as a worldly or spiritual evil, and the punishment annexed to it as a temporal or eternal punishment, we cannot fail to commend the exercise of that wisdom by which they are foreseen and avoided; for it is sanctioned by the soundest and clearest dictates of reason and revelation. Now, if the call for the exercise of such wisdom rises in proportion to the nature and extent of the evil, our exposure to it, and the numbers that have been injured or ruined by it, then does the

neglect of public worship, which is deprecated in our text, demand a most serious and prayerful investigation; for it is an evil of fearful extent, and replete with consequences the most dangerous, as well as so common as to diminish a sense of its guilt in the minds of many.

This neglect is not a solitary evil; it is the one great external act of disobedience, which, above all others, leaves us in all the sad ruins of the fall, and cuts us off from all the blessings the Son of God died to procure us; not that we mean to imply, that the bare act of attendance upon divine ordinances will put us in possession of the blessings of salvation, but simply that they are the appointed chanel for dispensing those blessings; and that, by slighting the means, we deprive ourselves of the blessings they were designed to convey.

The consequences of neglecting public worship are not merely confined to the spiritual loss we thereby sustain, there are other consequences, not so apparent, which deserve to be noticed.

To enlarge upon, or even to enumerate, all the evil effects resulting from forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, would far exceed the limits of this discourse. We must confine our considerations to some of the most direct and dangerous consequences, a knowledge of which may tend, under the divine blessing, to exercise over us the most practical and salutary influence; by endearing to us the sanctuary, and rendering us more careful of slighting its ordinances.

This object may be best attained, and afford us the clearest and simplest view of the consequences of neglecting public worship—

FIRST. BY SHEWING THAT THE LOSS WE THEREBY SUSTAIN IS GREAT.

SECONDLY. THAT, IN ADDITION TO THIS LOSS, WE INFLICT UPON OURSELVES THE DEEPEST INJURY, AND LAY OURSELVES OPEN TO THE GREATEST TEMPTATIONS.

In order to avoid misapprehensions on this subject, and that we may not be supposed to give an exaggerated account of the consequences of neglecting public worship, I would observe, that we are treating of the consequences of VOLUNTARY neglect, and that these differ very widely from the consequences of being unavoidably detained from the house of God ; for, though the natural result is the same, whatever cause prevents our attendance, as we are thereby deprived of the benefit of the public means of grace, the spiritual result is widely different ; for the former, being voluntary, originates in guilt, and contracts guilt ; whereas, the latter being involuntary, is not founded in guilt, nor does it incur guilt. And should the individuals who are detained by necessity, and not by choice, from the sanctuary, be disposed to spend the hours allotted to its services in the exercise of private devotion, there is no reason why they may not expect the blessing of God in their closets, and trust that these hours may be profitably employed ; whereas, those who volun-

tarily absent themselves from the house of God, by this very act of disobedience disqualify themselves for performing the duties and enjoying the privileges of private devotion, nor can they expect to find communion with God in their closets, when God commands them to be present in the assembly of his saints. If public worship was merely a *human institution*, however excellent, beneficial, or expedient it might be, we could not attempt to make this distinction between its voluntary and involuntary neglect. It is simply because it is a **DIVINE INSTITUTION** that the loss sustained by its wilful neglect is so irretrievable, and the consequences so disastrous.

It is unnecessary that we should here enlarge on the nature and extent of the loss sustained by the neglecters of public worship, as we can gather sufficient information on this subject from the nature of the plea which is so frequently urged for its neglect—"We can read and pray at home." By this it is obviously intended to supply the place of two leading designs of the services of the sanctuary—**PUBLIC PRAYER AND INSTRUCTION**.

If they are deprived of the advantages of those means of grace by their neglect, and if private prayer and study, by which they seek to supply their place, will not avail, then the loss is *great* and irreparable.

While we assert, and proceed to prove, that the private means of grace will not supply the place of the public means of grace, when these latter

are wilfully neglected, we would distinctly state, that we do not attempt to limit the Holy One of Israel, or set specific bounds to the manner and mode of his dealings with men; for, "His ways are in the sea," as well as "in the sanctuary." And, in the exercise of his sovereign grace, he sometimes employs means the most unlikely, and subjects the most unworthy, to display the freeness of his grace, and the riches of his love; proclaiming to all, that "He will work, and none shall let it." Thus he arrested Saul, when persecuting his saints and making havoc of his church, and made him the monument of his love, and the trophy of his grace. But let us remember, that such are not the rule, but the exceptions, of his dealings with men, and that, while we dare not *limit God, he limits us*; and we are only warranted to expect the promised blessing by the diligent use and improvement of the prescribed means.

Viewing, then, those who wilfully neglect public worship under the most favourable circumstances, by supposing them disposed to employ private prayer and study, to supply the place of public prayer and instruction,—let us enquire how far they are warranted to expect the spiritual blessings those means of grace were appointed to convey.

First, as regards prayer. We are not infringing on the freeness of the gospel, when we state that there are certain preventatives to God's hearing prayer. Thus David affirms, "If I regard ini-

quity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me;" and Solomon declares "He that turneth away his ear from hearing the law, even his *prayer* shall be an *abomination*." Our Lord's directions to his disciples before they came to offer their gift, as well as the prayer he taught them, afford examples of this. St. James alludes to the same subject when he says, "Let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord;" and again, "Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss." We find the same sentiments in several of our Collects, which, though designed as simply expressive of the sinner's wants, and the saint's desires, embody a fund of sound divinity, *collected* as they are (and as the term implies) from the portions of scripture to which they are annexed. As they will further tend to illustrate our subject, I would refer to a few of them:—"Mercifully grant unto us such a measure of thy grace, that we, *running the way of thy commandments, may obtain thy gracious promises*, and be made partakers of thy heavenly treasure; through Jesus Christ our Lord." Again, "That we may *obtain* that which thou dost *promise*, make us to *love* that which thou dost *command*." As the scriptural character of these prayers will be admitted by every Christian mind, we may infer from them, as well as those passages of Holy Writ to which we have referred, that it is a sound and scriptural maxim, *That in order to obtain the promise, we must obey the command*.

How, then, stand the neglecters of public wor-

ship, with regard to the promise, "Call upon me, and I will answer thee?" They live in the open violation of a known and positive command—"Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together;" they voluntarily turn their back upon "the House of Prayer;" and then profess to avail themselves of the privilege and benefit of private prayer, expecting not only to obtain the ends for which private prayer was permitted and appointed, but also to obtain the same advantages the people of God derive from public prayer. Will God, who is jealous of his glory and the honour of his house, hear the prayer of such? If there is a time when the sinner shall call, and God will not hear, surely we may infer that there is no time, or no circumstances, in which the sinner is less warranted to expect that God will hear his private prayer, than when he forsakes "the House of Prayer;" save, indeed, the prayer of contrition for his past neglect, and sincere prayer for grace to enable him, on the next opportunity, to go up to worship in God's holy temple. But where this latter prayer and resolution is wanting, there is a second reason which prevents the neglecters of public worship from obtaining the spiritual blessings of private prayer. For even admitting that God was so pledged to hear prayer, as to warrant the sinner under any circumstances to approach the throne of grace, expecting to obtain his request; yet it will be granted by every one who has the slightest knowledge of his Bible, that much must still depend upon the spirit and nature

of the prayer. "God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth." It must be a *suitable* prayer, for "if we ask *amiss*, God will not hear." It must be the prayer of faith, for "whatever is not of faith, is sin." It must be the prayer of sincerity, "for the double-minded man shall receive nothing of the Lord."

Now, as we are wholly dependent upon the gracious influences of the Holy Spirit, to indite the prayer that is acceptable to God, and to enable us to worship Him in spirit and in truth; if there is such a thing as grieving the Spirit, resisting the Spirit, quenching the Spirit—are we not taking the most direct method to deprive ourselves of His gracious aid, by neglecting a known duty, in forsaking that temple in which He loves to dwell, and where He has especially promised to be present with His people?

And so fearful and baneful is such a course, that a little reflection will be sufficient to convince us, that by it we forfeit all claims upon a prayer-hearing God to grant our requests, and upon the Holy Spirit to indite our prayers; and the probable result is, that under such circumstances, we shall lose the very desire to pray.

Thus, by slighting "the House of Prayer," we deprive ourselves not only of the benefit of public prayer, but the benefit of private prayer likewise; or, in other words, of the benefit and privilege of prayer altogether—the only channel of communication between us and God; the only means by

which our spiritual wants can be made known, and our spiritual necessities relieved.

Secondly, as prayer is the medium of communication between us and God, the Word of God is the medium of communication between God and us; as we speak to God in prayer, so God speaks to us in, and by, His word. And as God invites us to His holy temple as a place of prayer, He also invites us to it as a means of instruction. "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will *teach* us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Isaiah ii. 3. Here the house of God is recognised as a place of instruction; and the command to the apostles was, "Go, stand and speak in the temple, to the people, all the words of this life." Acts v. 20. There, from the treasury of divine truth, the people are to be instructed in the will of God, and in all things that pertain to life and godliness. And hence preaching is styled, "*the ministry of the word.*"

How, then, stand the neglecters of public worship, with regard to the means of obtaining a knowledge of divine truth, while they forsake the public means of instruction? We do not deny that much religious information may be obtained from the word of God and religious books; but, as all religious knowledge is not saving, sanctifying knowledge — as there is a knowledge of great extent, which is, notwithstanding, vain and profitless—a knowledge that puffeth up, rather than humbleth; if we would not woefully deceive our-

selves, by mistaking a barren, theoretical knowledge for the practical and life-giving knowledge of divine truth, let us see if we are warranted in expecting to obtain such knowledge while we slight the public means of instruction. If we are wholly dependent upon the Holy Spirit's teaching, for a saving knowledge of divine truth—if, without his enlightening and life-giving influences, the word of God is a dead letter, which killeth rather than giveth life—if we can never know its truth, feel its quickening power, or enjoy its blessings, unless the Holy Spirit reveals it to our minds, and applies it to our hearts, then, as we can no more expect the gracious influence of the Spirit in private study than in private prayer, while we neglect the public means of grace, the knowledge we obtain under such circumstances is far more likely to prove a curse than a blessing, and its tendency more likely to elate than to humble the soul. And we generally find those who devote a portion of the Sabbath to reading, while they neglect public worship, are most vain and self-willed, and for the most part destitute of the moral qualification for obtaining spiritual knowledge, which is a meek, teachable, prayerful, and practical spirit, without which we may seek, but shall never find, the knowledge that maketh wise unto salvation.

Consider, then, dear brethren, the extent of the loss we sustain, by slighting the public means of instruction. It is not my design to enlarge on the necessity and excellency of divine knowledge,

and the misery and danger of spiritual ignorance ; suffice it to say, "that the soul be without knowledge is not good." The Lord declares of the people, "They perish for lack of knowledge." Now, if the knowledge of the will of God be necessary to obedience, and obedience to the will of God be necessary to happiness ; and if the knowledge of ourselves be necessary to teach us our wants and our necessities, and direct us in our supplications at the throne of grace, then we may form some remote conception of the importance of divine knowledge, and the misery and danger of being destitute of it, and deprived of the means of spiritual instruction.

In addition to this spiritual destitution, as we have already seen, the voluntary neglecters of public worship are placed in a position in which they cannot reasonably expect that God will hear their prayer, the Holy Spirit indite it, or the desire of their hearts lead them to the throne of grace. Surely, then, we are clearly borne out in affirming, that the loss sustained by forsaking the House of God is great and irreparable ; and truly we may apply to those who *slight* the public means of grace, what the excellent Matthew Henry observes of those who are *cut off* from those ordinances, "That they are likely to lose *all religion*, and will, by degrees, cease from fearing the Lord. Though the form and profession of religion are kept up by many without the life and power of it, yet the life and power of it will not long be kept up without the form and profession of it. You

take away grace, if you take away the means of grace."

We have hitherto confined our considerations to the spiritual blessings we are deprived of by neglecting the public means of grace, and have seen the loss to be *great and irreparable*.

II. It remains for us next to notice, in addition to this negative view of our subject, the positive injury that is inflicted; the temptations to which we are exposed; and the fatal consequences which result from disregarding the public ordinances of religion.

The religion of the Bible forms a system of outward restraints and inward principles — restraints, the most needful and salutary, graciously designed to preserve us from whatever might endanger our souls, or mar our happiness — principles, the most powerful to fortify us against temptation, and preserve us from the pollutions and defilements of a corrupt and sinful world, and enable us to maintain a consistency and propriety of conduct, faithfully discharging our duty to our neighbour and to our God.

Now, it ought to be strongly impressed upon our minds, that in proportion as the restraints of religion are broken through, or not submitted to, the principles of the gospel will cease to operate. An intelligent perception of this fact is calculated to exercise a practical influence over us, and enable us to see, at once, that duty and advantage must, necessarily, be indissolubly bound

together, and failure in duty, and spiritual injury, inseparably connected.

This may be affirmed, more or less, of the performance or failure of every duty; but it applies with especial force to the subject before us—the neglect of the external duties of religion.

First. Because the injury inflicted by failure in duty, will be in proportion to the *obvious* and *binding obligation* of that duty; and there is no duty imposed upon us under more clear and binding obligations, than that of reverencing the sanctuary and attending its ordinances.

Secondly. Because the injury resulting from neglect of duty, will be found to exist in proportion to the benefits resulting from its due performance. Hence the greatest blessings and highest privileges, when slighted or perverted, generally become the greatest curses. Now the Sabbath and the sanctuary were appointed, and are designed, for the highest, and holiest, and happiest purposes. The great ends of the Sabbath are promoted by the sanctuary, and its choicest blessings there dispensed. The command is, “Thou shalt keep my Sabbaths, and reverence my sanctuary.” We cannot, therefore, slight the sanctuary without contemning our highest privileges and choicest blessings. Nor does it require much sagacity to foresee how the Sabbath will be spent when the sanctuary is forsaken, especially those hours which ought to be devoted to its solemn services.

To this latter subject I now wish particularly

to direct your candid attention—*How the hours of Divine Service will probably be spent, by those who refuse to employ them as God appoints.* What has been wisely observed, with regard to private devotion, may truly be applied to public devotion, “That the time which ought to be spent in devotion, and is not so employed, will be the worst spent time of our lives;” that more evil, and less good, will pass through our minds than at any other season. This I shall explain and illustrate, first, from a sentiment, the truth of which is almost universally admitted, that “what is obtained by unfair or unjust means, yields no advantage to the possessor.” Now, if we take this sentiment in connexion with a passage in the Word of God, “Will a man rob God?” and if it is admitted, in our dealings with men, that “what is ill gotten is ill spent,” without dwelling on the cause of this, which doubtless arises from the fact that the curse of God rests upon it, and not that blessing which “maketh rich, and addeth no sorrow with it,”—we ask, if it hold true of other possessions, can we deny that it may not equally hold true of our time? and if we cannot defraud our neighbour of his property without ill spending what we thus obtain, can we rob God of the time which should be publicly spent in *His service*, and deny that that time will be ill spent, and prove to us a curse? Surely if, according to the divine threatening, “He that diggeth a pit, shall fall into it; and whoso breaketh an hedge, a serpent shall bite him,” we cannot expect to “rob God, and be innocent.”

Again, if the time devoted to the services of the sanctuary is the special season for sowing the seeds of eternal truth and holiness, we may reasonably infer, that the hours which ought to be spent in public devotion, and are not so employed, are special seasons for Satan to sow the seeds of error and corruption. I am aware that Satan is described as actively engaged among the public worshippers of God, as they come up to His temple—while they are engaged in its services—and immediately after they depart from them. But here his work is chiefly a work of resistance; endeavouring to fortify them against the power of truth—to blind their minds to the perception of the gospel—and harden their hearts against its reception; or, to counteract any serious impressions that have been made, and rob them of the blessings they have received. Whereas, among the neglecters of public worship, having little to counteract, we may infer he is not so much engaged in effacing serious impressions, as in directly imbuing their minds with evil, and sowing the seeds of corruption in hearts which are empty, and prepared for its reception: thus carrying on his deeds of darkness without the fear of detection or the prospect of defeat.

There are considerations suggested by our text and the context, which point out other fatal consequences resulting from forsaking the assembly of the saints, and deeply deserve our serious attention. First,—We are exhorted not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together, in connexion with the benefits derived from Christian

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fellowship and communication. If we violate the command, we deprive ourselves of the blessings of the former, and the advantages of the latter; and we shall find ourselves, both from necessity and from choice, liable to be associated with those whose conduct is here deprecated, and whose society the Word of God elsewhere describes as most pernicious. We say from *necessity*; for if we have any associates during the *hours* of divine service, either in our dwellings or abroad, they *must* be the neglecters of public worship. And as a union of feeling, sentiment, or pursuit generally forms the class of our associates, it is not likely the truly pious will seek the society of the neglecters of public worship, or the neglecters of public worship seek theirs. Hence, from necessity and choice, they are deprived of the society of the best, and associated with the worst, class of men; and I would beseech them, before they arrive at the last stage of impiety, attentively to mark the steps which lead to such an awful state; for it is “by walking in the counsel of the ungodly, and standing in the way of sinners,” that at last they arrive at the climax of impiety—“sitting in the seat of the scornful.” Psalm i. 1.

The second consideration to which I would direct your attention is, an evil the most disastrous, which frequently results from the neglect of public worship, and which it is the immediate object of our text to guard us against — *Apostacy* — or final departure from God. It would be foreign to our purpose to enlarge upon this fearful

evil, or to trace the various steps which lead to such an awful state; suffice it to say, it is an evil at which every christian mind trembles, and against which, every sincere soul will watch and pray fervently; and the first cause and symptom of it, will frequently be found in the neglect of religious duties, especially the duties and ordinances of the sanctuary. If we would, therefore, wish to "hold fast our *profession*," and not be numbered among those "who draw back unto perdition," we need to be watchful, lest we lose a relish or become indisposed for the public service of God, and thus forsake his house, and shun the friendship and society of his people, which have caused many to make shipwreck of their faith, and depart from the living God. We might adduce many facts to corroborate this statement; but as we have already mentioned some, we forbear, and would simply observe, that there are few places where some such melancholy cases will not be found; and there is no class of men more difficult to deal with, or none who appear more hopeless, than those who once were accustomed to join in public worship, and appeared to delight in its services, but have now forsaken the assembly and the society of the saints.

In speaking of apostacy, as described in the chapter before us as a consequence of neglecting public worship, it so clearly implies *previous knowledge, profession, and a certain measure of spiritual attainments*, that it cannot be applicable to all classes of the neglecters of public worship, but must be confined to those who were *once* in

the habit of attending. While, therefore, we would set before those who are relaxing, or have relaxed, in their diligence in attending divine ordinances, the fearful evil of apostacy, to which they are exposed by "forsaking the assembling of ourselves together," we would remind those who never have been in the habit of regular attendance upon the public means of grace, there are other views, equally fatal, which are the almost inevitable consequence of their conduct—*spiritual ignorance* and *spiritual indifference*. These we have already shown to be powerful *causes* of the neglect of public worship, and it is still more apparent, that they are the certain consequences of such neglect; as, by it, spiritual ignorance is *perpetuated*, and spiritual indifference *increased*—evils replete with danger the most apparent, and consequences too extensive and disastrous for ideas to conceive, or words express.

In whatever point of view we regard the voluntary neglecters of public worship, the position in which they are placed is most melancholy, and the consequences to which they are exposed are most fearful. They have turned their backs upon the means of grace, and reversed the order in which God would place them; for *behind* "is as the garden of Eden, and before them a desolate wilderness;" Joel ii. 3. "The man that wandereth out of the way of understanding, shall remain in the congregation of the dead." Prov. xxi. 16.

Pause, then, dear brethren, and consider well both the probable and inevitable consequences of slighting the public ordinances of God. Surely,

there is no act of neglect, the guilt of which is more apparent, and the consequences of which, *here* and hereafter, are more fatal and disastrous, than that of neglecting the public duties of religion. And allow me, *affectionately*, but *solemnly*, to remind you, that these consequences are not confined merely to those who are habitual neglecters of divine worship, but are, more or less, the result of every act of *voluntary neglect*. If we would, therefore, avoid such fearful consequences, and obtain the blessed ends for which the services of God's house were appointed, we must be diligent in our attendance, and allow nothing but claims of absolute necessity to prevent our going up, on the Lord's day, to offer our morning and evening sacrifice of prayer and thanksgiving, to hear the words of eternal life, and to see his power and glory as they are seen in the sanctuary.

Hitherto we have confined our observations to the consequences of the wilful neglect of public worship, save a few words of explanation, in the opening of our subject, relative to the consequences of being unavoidably detained from the house of God. There is one consideration on the latter subject deserving of special attention—the marked difference between the feelings and views of many who are, or suppose themselves to be, detained from the sanctuary, and the feelings and views of the saints of old, when they were debarred from its services. The *latter* appear wholly absorbed with a sense of their spiritual loss, and with a desire for restoration to their spiritual privileges; whereas, the *former*, if they only feel they are detained by

necessity, not by choice, rest satisfied as to the result, and scarcely seem to feel or deplore their loss. This difference mainly consists in the one realizing their spiritual destitution, and desiring a supply for their necessities, which the ordinances of religion were designed to convey; while the other, overlooking their spiritual necessities, rest satisfied if no guilt is contracted by their absence from those ordinances: hence the striking difference between their sentiments and those expressed by the Psalmist, an instance of which we have in Ps. lxxxiv. 2—"My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God."

In conclusion, I would press upon your attention, the necessity of obtaining a realizing and abiding sense of your spiritual destitution, which alone can endear to you the services of the sanctuary, and enable you to regard them with the same affection as the saints of old. And while you so regard them, and deplore your loss when detained by illness or other providential impediments from the house of God, I would affectionately remind you, that "if you cannot go up to the house of the Lord, you may go by faith to the Lord of the house;" and while the desire of your hearts is, "not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is," no confinement or outward circumstances can separate you from the gracious visits of your beloved Saviour.



SERMON V.

THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PSALM v. 7.

“AS FOR ME, I WILL COME INTO THY HOUSE IN THE
MULTITUDE OF THY MERCY; AND IN THY FEAR
WILL I WORSHIP TOWARD THY HOLY TEMPLE.”

MAN is roused to action by motive; it has, therefore, been well observed, “When we are solicitous to engage our friends in any particular pursuit, we should probably endeavour to convince them, not only of its excellency, but of its tendency to promote their honour, their interest, or their happiness.” In addition to this, we might observe, that if we were able to show that there was no alternative between engaging in the pursuit we propose, or sustaining a serious loss, and inflicting upon themselves a deep injury, then we should feel ourselves armed with arguments the most convincing, and furnished with inducements the most likely to prevail.

And with such arguments and inducements are we in the highest degree supplied, when we

appeal to a professing Christian community, on behalf of public worship, and urge them to a diligent attendance upon its ordinances; for not only are such ordinances the most excellent, and their tendency the most beneficial, but the consequences of their neglect are most dangerous and injurious.

We have already considered the evil effects resulting from the neglect of public worship. We now proceed to notice—

I. THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

II. THE MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO ITS OBSERVANCE.

III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH ITS ORDINANCES SHOULD BE ATTENDED.

I. THE ADVANTAGES OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

1. We may form some idea of the *general* advantages of the services of the sanctuary, from the estimation in which they have always been held by the best and wisest of men. The resolution expressed in our text, affords a proof of the high value David set upon divine ordinances—“As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple.” This resolution was not formed *merely* under the pressure of sorrow or affliction; or like those secret vows made in the time of trouble and the hour of danger, much less from a blind attachment to that temple in which his fathers worshipped. It sprung from an intelligent and realising appre-

hension of the blessings which flowed from its ordinances, and the high privilege of being permitted publicly to worship God in the assembly of his people. It was this which called forth that lively expression of joy—"I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord:" and that feeling of devout attachment—"Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth." And while the minds of many are agitated by various desires, or bewildered by the multiplicity of their pursuits, he concentrates all his wishes, and sets before him one object worthy of his most strenuous efforts—"One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his temple." To be ~~de~~barred from such privileges, he deemed his greatest privation and severest trial: nor can we conceive language more touchingly descriptive of the mingled emotions of deep reverence, strong affection, and ardent desire, than that which he employs with regard to the house of his God—"How amiable are thy tabernacles, O Lord of hosts! my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth, for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh crieth out for the living God." "O God, thou art my God; early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee, my flesh longeth for thee in a dry and thirsty land, where no water is, to see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary." It is impossible to enter

into the import of these passages, and the resolution expressed in the cxxxii. Psalm — “Surely I will not come into the tabernacle of my house, nor go up into my bed; I will not give sleep to mine eyes, or slumber to mine eyelids, until I find out a place for the Lord, an habitation for the mighty God of Jacob,” without admiring his unabated zeal and attachment for the house of his God, when *forbidden* to build the temple in honour of the God he loved, and for those services in which he delighted. As far as he was permitted, he gladly contributed towards its erection, “because he had set his affection to the house of his God.” “And in contemplation of the greatness of the work, and the majesty of his God, he prepared *with all his might, and consecrated all his treasures, and all his service, for the house of his God.* Nor did his illustrious son devote less preparation of heart and consecration of service to the building of the spiritual temple, than to that of the magnificent material temple, which was the glory of his nation, and the wonder of the world.” And the sublime prayer which he offered at the dedication of the temple, affords a proof of the high estimation in which he held public worship; nor can we read the following passages, without obtaining more than a general view of its advantages — “Have respect, therefore, to the prayer of thy servant, and to his supplication, O Lord, my God, to hearken unto the cry and the prayer which thy servant prayeth before thee: that thine eyes may be open upon this house day

and night, upon the place whereof thou hast said, that thou wouldest put thy name there; to hearken unto the prayer which thy servant prayeth toward this place." And, after he had beautifully individualized the various classes of petitioners, whether suffering under outward trouble, or inward conflict, and besought God that his "priests" might "be clothed with salvation, and his saints rejoice in goodness," "the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy prayer and thy supplication, that thou hast made before me: I have hallowed this house which thou hast built, to put my name there for ever; and mine eyes and mine heart shall be there perpetually." 2 Chron. vi., and 1 Kings ix. 3.

But we have a higher example than David or Solomon of attachment to the house of God, and zeal for its services, manifested by him who "holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, and walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks," which forcibly recalled to the remembrance of his disciples the prophetic declaration, "The zeal of thy house hath eaten me up." And all his followers, in proportion as they have been animated by the same spirit, have manifested the same zeal for the public duties of religion, and delight in the services of the sanctuary; and we greatly mistake the mind of the Spirit in dictating the book of Psalms, if we regard those strong expressions of attachment and esteem for the house of God as merely expressive of the feelings and sentiments of the Psalmist, and not equally

expressive of the feelings and sentiments of all true believers and spiritual worshippers.

2. We have hitherto spoken of the *general* advantages of public worship; we now proceed to notice a few particulars which endear the sanctuary to the people of God, and which point out the *special* advantages of public worship.

First. "My house," saith the Lord, "shall be called the house of prayer unto all nations." Here God appoints that *prayer* should be offered, and specially promises to meet and bless his people—"There I will meet with thee, and I will commune with thee from above the mercy-seat." And our Saviour declares, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." And who, dear brethren, can know or realize the blessings of communion with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ, and be insensible of the advantages of those ordinances, appointed for so great and glorious a purpose? Who can estimate the benefit of prayer—of pouring out our hearts before God, and not feel the unspeakable advantage of engaging in those public services to which such peculiar promises are attached? If we were to enlarge on the advantages of public prayer, as an inducement to attend "the house of prayer," it would lead us to treat on the advantages of prayer in general; for, as we have already shown, in proportion as we slight or neglect public prayer, we disqualify ourselves for performing the duties, and deprive ourselves of the advantages, of private and family prayer;

for the full benefit of prayer can only be obtained by the diligent use and improvement of all the means of prayer which God has put within our reach. But without enlarging on this subject, or pointing out how dependent God has made us upon one means of grace, in order to reap the *full* benefit of the other, we would proceed to notice the special design and advantage of public worship. If God is publicly dishonoured in the world—if his holy name is blasphemed, and his authority set at nought, surely, it is but reasonable, that “they that fear the Lord” should repair to his courts, and that a nation’s sins should be as publicly confessed as they are publicly committed—that his holy name should be as publicly adored and blessed in “the great congregation,” as it is dishonoured and blasphemed in the world. Again, if a nation’s wants are public, should they not be *publicly expressed*? if a nation’s mercies are public, should they not be *publicly acknowledged*? And what so likely to promote humility, zeal, and devotion, as joining in the public confession of sin, and the fervent supplication for mercy and grace, to help in time of need? or what so likely to call forth gratitude to “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort,” as uniting with the congregation of his people, even those whose hearts the Lord hath touched, in ascribing “blessing, and honour, and glory, and power, unto him that sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb for ever and ever?” Rev. v. 13.

Praise is the highest tribute a creature can pay

to his Creator, and the noblest and most delightful service in which a creature can engage. The spirit of praise may well be deemed the highest Christian attainment, as it has less of the selfishness which often mingles with other religious duties, and is most closely allied to the spirit of those around the throne, whose happiest employment is praise. This spirit of praise largely characterized the saints of old; and to us, as well as to them, is the invitation given,—“Serve the Lord with gladness, and come before his presence with singing. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise: be thankful unto him, and bless his name. Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise in the congregation of the saints.” In the faithful and diligent performance of these duties, while we are *directly* reaping individual advantage, we are taking the surest method to secure our nation’s peace, and advance our nation’s prosperity; and in her peace shall we have peace, and in her prosperity shall we prosper.

A second design and advantage of public worship is, *that it affords us an opportunity of publicly confessing Christ before men.* This duty our Lord strongly imposes upon us. Now, as publicly confessing Christ clearly implies being identified with his people, the public assembly not only affords this opportunity of uniting ourselves with them, and thus confessing Christ in “the great congregation,” but also strengthens and encourages us to confess him in the world.

And the communion of saints is a great means of enabling us "to hold fast the profession of our faith." We are likewise called, in "the solemn assembly," to pay our vows unto the Lord,—the public vows which our Christian profession imposes upon us, and those private vows which we have made in the time of difficulty, or the hour of danger: as the Psalmist declares,—
"My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my *vows* before them that fear him." And as failure in these duties is branded with God's disapprobation, and inflicts a deep injury on the soul, so the due performance of them is commanded by our Lord, and attended with the most blessed results: "For whosoever (saith our Lord) shall confess me before men, him shall the son of man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth me before men, shall be denied before the angels of God."—Luke xii. 8, 9.

A third design of the services of the sanctuary, which points out the advantages of public worship, is, *spiritual instruction and consolation*. "Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob: and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths." Thus we find, under the Old Testament dispensation, "they read in the book of the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading." When our Lord came to Nazareth, "as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read"; and

so unfolded prophecy, that "all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth."—Luke iv. 16. 22. And to the same effect was the command to the apostles,—“Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.” The house of God is clearly the appointed place for proclaiming the truths and dispensing the blessings of the Gospel: that Gospel brings “glory to God in the highest, on earth peace, good will towards men.” And who can adequately express the utility of the public means of grace, if we regard them as the appointed channels for dispensing the rich blessings of salvation?

But, independently of preaching being a divine ordinance for the conversion of sinners, and the building up of the Church of Christ, do we not feel that there is a wide difference in the effect produced by reading a sermon at home, and hearing it delivered in public? However excellent or beneficial the former may be, if we inquire where the understanding of the sinner was first informed,—where his heart was first impressed,—where the light of divine truth first shone into the dark chambers of his soul,—in the vast majority of cases shall we not be directed to the house of God, as the place where the first saving impressions were produced? There the sinner was first led to know the truth, to feel the power, and to enjoy the blessings, of the Gospel. And how often have the children of God in sorrow and perplexity repaired to the courts of the Lord, and there

found relief! They have felt that God has given the tongue of the learned to his ministers, "that they should know how to speak a word in season to them that are weary,"—that by them he has spoken comfortably to their hearts, and taught them to profit; and, under a deep and intelligent apprehension of the vast utility of public preaching, they can truly say, "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!"

II. We have now, dear brethren, glanced at some of the advantages of public worship; we next proceed to a brief consideration of the **MOTIVES WHICH SHOULD LEAD TO ITS OBSERVANCE.**

The *first* to which we shall advert is, *Duty, or obedience to God's command*,—"Thou shalt reverence my sanctuary." Were the advantages of public worship concealed from our view, the obligation to attend would still be binding, and a violation of that obligation consequently injurious. Duty and advantage are links of the same chain; and one special advantage of the path of duty being ascertained is, that it makes the believer's path plain and obvious. "If the Lord directs, all doubt and hesitation should be banished from our minds," as to the line of conduct we should pursue: and we may rest assured the Lord never imposes upon us a command, without consulting our good, as well as his glory.

A *second* motive which we would notice is embodied in our text, and is frequently expressed by the Psalmist as a constraining motive for going up

to the house of God, — *to engage in the duties of prayer and praise.* This motive for coming to the house of God we would specially press upon your attention, as it is very frequently overlooked by those from whom we might expect better things; and from the expressions of some, we might suppose, that to hear the preaching of the Gospel was the one and only object which induced them to attend public worship; hence we hear persons so much oftener speak of “going to hear a minister preach,” or, “sitting under such a ministry,” than of worshipping God in his holy temple, or praising him in the congregation of the saints. We do not mean to depreciate public preaching, as it is a blessing of inconceivable and vital importance; but we cannot dismiss the consideration of this topic without warning you against slighting the ordinances of prayer and praise, by making the attraction of preaching the almost sole motive for coming to the house of God. Such feelings and sentiments, to say the least, argue but a low state of Christian attainment, and little of the spirit of devotion; and not only deprive us of the full advantage of public prayer and thanksgiving, but also prevent our receiving the full benefit of public instruction.

Thirdly. However unnecessary it may appear, to press upon the attention of some *the utility of preaching*, as a motive for attendance upon the services of the sanctuary—as they seem fully aware of it, and consider it as almost the sole motive—it is necessary to urge this as a *third* motive for

attendance upon the attention of others, who would sink preaching into comparative insignificance, and consider prayer the almost sole motive for going up to the house of God ; as if prayer alone was a divine ordinance, and preaching little more than a human device. We cannot too strongly deprecate such sentiments, or too distinctly state, that public prayer and public preaching are equally divine ordinances ; and, though perfectly distinct, equally necessary and equally beneficial ; and to attempt to institute a comparison between their necessity or utility, is not only most unscriptural, but argues ignorance of the nature and design of each. By prayer, we speak to God ; by preaching, God speaks to us. They mutually aid and assist each other : take away one, and you will, for the most part, deprive us of the advantage of the other : in this respect we may say, "What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." While public prayer occupies the position in our estimation its value and importance demand, we cannot too highly appreciate the utility of public preaching ; nor is it necessary that the most exalted views of its advantages should in the slightest degree lead us to depreciate the value of public prayer ; we may "hold to the one without despising the other."

Nor have we any cause to fear that any *scriptural motive* for attending the house of God can be too strong. The just ground of alarm is, lest we should become partial with regard to the ordinances of God's house, by attaching much im-

portance to one, and comparatively little to another. Our best preservative against this common error, and the most likely means of obtaining scriptural motives for engaging in the services of the sanctuary, will be, to endeavour to imbibe that spirit so highly commended by our Lord, and so largely manifested in the book of Psalms,—“hungering and thirsting after righteousness.”

We have made no allusion to the *unscriptural motives* from which many attend the house of God, and which prevent their deriving advantage from its services; this subject will come under consideration in our next discourse. Our text, however, leads us to notice the motive of self-righteousness, which induces many to attend, as very different from that by which David was actuated. And as there is a close connexion between the motives which bring us to the house of God, and the spirit in which we attend, this directly leads us to the third subject of our inquiry.

III. THE SPIRIT IN WHICH THE SERVICES OF THE SANCTUARY OUGHT TO BE ATTENDED.

There is a self-righteous spirit, in which many come up to worship in God's holy temple, which is highly displeasing to God, and totally disqualifies them for the profitable performance of its duties. The Psalmist disclaims this spirit, when he declares, in the words of our text, “I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy.” It was in the infinite mercy of God that David confided, and not in any merit or righteousness of his own, in his approaches to God. He came

up in the spirit of the publican, who "smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner,"—and not in that of the pharisee, who thanked God he was not as other men.

1. *A spirit of godly fear*, was that in which David sought to engage in public worship—"in thy fear I will worship toward thy holy temple"—and we ought to cultivate such a spirit in our approaches to God. This godly fear is far removed from that slavish "fear which hath torment." It is a filial, tender fear toward a loving and gracious father, springing from a consciousness of our guilt and depravity, and from a discovery of the character and majesty of God. There is no Christian grace more frequently or highly commended in the word of God, or none to which more promises are attached; and it specially becomes us, when we engage in public worship; for "God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him." This godly fear is strongly opposed to levity and pride, and will produce that solemnity of mind which is so essential for the profitable performance and enjoyment of the services of the sanctuary; and lead to that preparation of heart which will enable us "to wait upon the Lord without distraction," and "receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save our souls."

2. To this godly fear, which will necessarily produce solemnity of mind, preparation of heart, and meekness of spirit, we must be careful to add

a *prayerful*, *believing*, and *practical* spirit; to each of which many promises are attached, and all of which are necessary qualifications for the profitable performance and improvement of the means of grace.

We do not merely need a spirit of prayer, in order to engage in the more devotional parts of divine service, it is equally needful in order to profit by hearing the word of God and the preaching of the Gospel; that we may make a prayerful application of the truth to ourselves, and that it may be carried home with divine power to our hearts, and rendered effectual through the mighty operation of the Holy Spirit.

The spirit of faith, too, is not only essential in order that we may draw nigh to God, and offer unto him an acceptable service of prayer and praise, but also to render the word of God profitable, — “for the word preached cannot profit, unless mixed with faith in them that hear it.”

A practical spirit, likewise, is of the utmost importance. Scripture strongly enjoins it; and our Lord submits his divine mission to this test, — “If any man will do His will, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.” — John vii. 17. Nor is this spirit merely necessary in order to understand the truth; but the truth, when known, is rendered effectual by being practised; therefore St. James exhorts us, — “Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves;” and, as has been well observed, “a ser-

mon is not done with when it is *preached*, for it has yet to be *practised*."

Without further enlarging upon the spirit in which the services of the sanctuary ought to be attended, we would bring our subject to a practical conclusion, by adverting to a simple consideration, which is calculated to exercise over us a most salutary influence, and will supply us with abundant matter for our own private meditation. If the temple of God below is designed as a type of, as well as a preparation for, the temple of God above, surely we cannot have too enlarged views of its spiritual advantages, or anticipate too much pure and holy delight from engaging in its services. And the same motives which induce us to long to enter our heavenly inheritance, should constrain us to a diligent attendance upon the services of God's house. Above all, the *spirit* which fits and qualifies us for the enjoyment of heaven, will be our best preparation for engaging in the duties of the tabernacle below. Let us then, dear brethren, when we come to worship in God's holy temple, endeavour to acquire the spirit we would wish to be in if we were then to be translated to his temple above. And the spirit which would best fit us for the sanctuary above, we shall find our best preparation for the duties of the sanctuary below. This subject, we say, will afford abundant matter for most profitable meditation, and diligent self-examination. And so largely did the saints of old indulge in such reflections, that it is sometimes difficult to ascertain, whether they speak of the

temple below or the temple above ; for so exalted were their views of the former, that many have supposed them to be speaking of the latter, though, on examination, the context is found to be opposed to such an interpretation.

May we be enabled to entertain the same views of the advantages of public worship as the saints of old, and then we may expect as fully to participate in the blessings of the sanctuary as they did, and to engage in its services from the same motives, and in the same spirit, as those of David, when he said, "As for me, I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy ; and in thy fear will I worship toward thy holy temple." Amen.

SERMON VI.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES WHICH RENDER AN ATTEND-
ANCE UPON THE SERVICES OF THE SANCTUARY
UNPROFITABLE.

MALACHI iii. 14.

“YE HAVE SAID, IT IS VAIN TO SERVE GOD ; AND
WHAT PROFIT IS IT THAT WE HAVE KEPT HIS
ORDINANCES, AND THAT WE HAVE WALKED MOURN-
FULLY BEFORE THE LORD OF HOSTS ?”

THAT the services of the sanctuary are frequently attended, and engaged in, without spiritual profit, cannot admit of reasonable doubt. To many of our public worshippers, with whom this is obviously the case, the subject is a matter of little concern, and no anxiety : to others, it is a subject of deep regret and painful solicitude, to see multitudes, some of whom may be near and dear to them, engaging in the public duties of religion without profit, or to feel that they themselves derive comparatively so little benefit from those services, which were designed to convey the richest spiritual blessings, and from which many derive the greatest advantage and find the greatest comfort.

This subject, which has been the complaint of the church in all ages, forms the burden of the prophecy of Malachi. The Lord, after strongly censuring the manner in which the services of his house were engaged in, and its duties performed, charges the people, in the words of our text, with saying, "It is in vain to serve God; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinances, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" This fearful avowal on the part of man, respecting the service of God, is corroborated by the Lord himself, Matthew xv. 9—"In vain they do worship me." And he testifies of such worshippers, in the first chapter and tenth verse of this prophecy—"I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts, neither will I accept an offering at your hand." Again, in the thirteenth verse, we find the people declaring of the service of God—"Behold, what a weariness it is." And in the prophecies of Isaiah, i. 14, the Lord declares of their services, "They are a trouble unto me; I am weary to bear them." And does nothing similar to this exist in our day, and among ourselves? Observation and experience afford melancholy proof that many public worshippers find the service of God both unprofitable and unpleasant.

The circumstances, therefore, which render an attendance upon the services of the sanctuary unprofitable form an important subject of enquiry; and if entered upon in a proper spirit may, under the blessing of God, be productive of great prac-

tical utility. We would therefore affectionately entreat your serious and prayerful attention,

I. TO A CONSIDERATION OF THE GENERAL CAUSES WHICH RENDER THE PUBLIC MEANS OF GRACE VAIN AND PROFITLESS.

II. TO SOME PARTICULARS SPECIFIED IN CONNECTION WITH OUR TEXT, AS CAUSES OF UNPROFITABLE ATTENDANCE UPON DIVINE ORDINANCES.

1. In noticing the general causes which render the public means of grace unprofitable,

1. We shall, in the first place, advert to two circumstances which disqualify us for performing the duties, and prevent our deriving benefit from the ordinances, of religion—*carelessness* and *irreverence*. A large portion of public worshippers, alike unconcerned about their souls, and regardless of God's glory, come up to the house of God, without any just apprehension of the nature of the services in which they are called to engage, or the character and majesty of Him whom they are professedly about to worship. Their conduct during the solemn services of the sanctuary affords melancholy proof, "that God is not in all their thoughts;" the inattention of some, and the drowsiness of others, openly evincing that religion is neither their element or their delight; that any train of thought is welcome which may entertain their imagination, and beguile the tedious hours of divine service.

Such persons may be said to *attend* the house of God, but certainly cannot be said to *engage* in

its services ; and it is evident, not only that they derive no benefit from such an attendance, but that they do not desire or expect any spiritual blessings. And should their minds have been at all solemnized during divine service, or their hearts impressed by the proclamation of truth, no sooner is the service concluded, than every serious thought is dissipated, and any transitory impressions effaced, by their levity or worldly conversation.

By *carelessness* and *irreverence* they *directly* frustrate the great ends for which public worship was designed—man's spiritual improvement, and God's glory ; for diligence and reverence are essential qualifications in order to obtain the promised blessings, and to enable us to glorify the God of our salvation. While, therefore, “the soul of the diligent shall be made fat”—for “the Lord is the rewarder of them that *diligently* seek him,” and “they shall be abundantly satisfied with the fatness of his house”—the careless may say, “It is vain to serve God ; and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance ?” and instead of honouring the Lord, who declares, “I will be sanctified in them that come nigh me, and before all the people I will be glorified,” their irreverent approach to his throne is a public affront to the Majesty of heaven. Oh remember, dear brethren, that “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are round about him ;” “let us therefore seek grace that we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear : for our God is a consuming fire.”

2. There is a class of public worshippers, whose outward demeanour evinces more decency and propriety in the house of God, than those to whom we have alluded, and who may be said not only to attend the house of God, but to engage in its services (at least, externally), who, nevertheless, fail in deriving advantage from its ordinances. This leads us to notice a second ground of unprofitable attendance—*coldness* and *formality*. These sad defects in public worship, though not so apparent as carelessness and irreverence, are strongly censured by our Lord, and pointed out by him as causes of unprofitable worship:—"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouths, and honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me." It is well, indeed, to engage in divine service,—to draw nigh to God with our mouth, in the public confession of sin, and supplication for mercy, and to honour him with our lips; for such is the command we have received,—"Take with you words, and turn to the Lord: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and receive us graciously: so will we render the calves of our lips." And what Christian heart would not respond to that prayer, "O Lord, open thou my lips, and my mouth shall show forth thy praise"? But it is possible to engage in the external performance of these reasonable and delightful duties, without being influenced by a spirit of prayer and praise, and with hearts that are far from God; and this renders the performance of them alike unprofitable to ourselves and unacceptable to him. The conduct of those who draw nigh to God, in public

worship, with their mouth, and honour him with their lips, while their hearts are far from him, is forcibly described in the prophecies of Ezekiel, and affords a striking and faithful delineation of the conduct of many of our public worshippers. Ezekiel xxx. 31:—"They come unto thee as the people cometh, and sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not do them: for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness." They come to the house of God "as the people cometh," or, as the margin reads it, "according to the coming of the people;" the example and opinion of others induce them to attend; they conduct themselves with decency and propriety during its solemn services; they sit as the people of God, without betraying weariness or irreverence; they hear with attention and apparent pleasure, and even approve of the statements that are advanced; and "the preacher is unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice; they hear his words, but they will not do them." Thus they derive no benefit from public instruction, and deceive themselves by being hearers only, and not doers of the word; and their worship is utterly vain and profitless, for their heart is estranged from God, and "goeth after their covetousness." Our Lord's address to the church at Sardis is specially applicable to such worshippers; they have a name to live—a fair reputation for godliness—the outward form and profession of religion; but are spiritually dead—destitute of the reality and vital power of

godliness. Our Lord testifies, that he has not "found their works perfect before God:" for while there were the outward acts of devotion, they were destitute of the inward principles of piety; there was the *shadow*, but not the *substance*—the external performance of duties, but no life or spirituality in their services. And thus, in the present day, coldness and formality characterise the devotion of many worshippers, and render their worship vain and profitless.

3. In assigning *coldness* and *formality* as causes of unprofitable attendance upon the services of the sanctuary, we made no allusion to *self-righteousness*. Though self-righteousness is necessarily associated with formality, there may be much formality in God's service from other causes than self-righteousness. We find the subjects separately treated of in the word of God, as is evident from some of the passages to which we have referred. We shall, therefore, notice *self-righteousness* as a separate and third ground of unprofitable attendance upon the public means of grace. Many attend the house of God from self-righteous motives, and engage in its services in a self-righteous spirit. These are directly contrary to the motives and spirit which the Gospel inculcates, and totally disqualify us for performing the duties and deriving benefit from the ordinances of public worship. There are two considerations which may be sufficient to convince us of the truth of these observations.

First, it requires but a slight knowledge of the nature of spiritual worship, to perceive that self-

righteousness must necessarily disqualify us for its profitable performance, by leading us to overlook or slight that divine assistance which is graciously promised to those who feel their need and implore its aid; and by inducing us to place dependence upon ourselves, instead of depending upon the Lord; and to trust in our merit, rather than his mercy. Moreover, self-righteousness, by concealing from us our necessities and spiritual destitution, leads us to think "we are rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing;" and thus prevents our seeking that merciful provision which is made for fallen man's necessities, but which the self-righteous neither feel they want, nor desire to possess.

The second evil consequence that results from self-righteousness is, that it leads us to rest upon "the ordinances of God, instead of the God of ordinances;" regarding the observance of divine ordinances as the *end* for which they were appointed, and not simply and solely as the *means* of leading us up to God, and the channels for conveying spiritual blessings to our souls. The ordinances of religion are, like Jacob's ladder, the channels of communication between heaven and earth, through which our prayers and praises may ascend to God, and spiritual supplies of grace descend upon us. For such objects they cannot be too highly prized, or too diligently employed. But to mistake the ordinances of religion for religion itself—the channels for the blessings they were designed to convey—will not only prevent our deriving benefit from divine ordinances, but will be attended with most injurious conse-

quences, and most fatal mistakes. For natural conscience is, for the most part, satisfied with the bare performance of the external duties of religion; and resting upon these will as surely destroy us, as if we were to slight or neglect them altogether. And many, from resting upon divine ordinances, instead of seeking God in those ordinances, may say of the sanctuary, as Jacob said, when he awoke from his dream at Bethel, "Surely the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not."

4. A fourth ground of unprofitable attendance upon the services of the sanctuary results from a motive which is mentioned in the scriptures as *a submission to "the precepts (or opinions) of men."* This is forcibly described in the prophecies of Isaiah, xxix. 13; a passage to which our Lord alludes, Matt. xv. 8, 9, as an instance of unprofitable worship. After the Prophet has described the *nature* of the worship, the *motives* of the worshippers are mentioned—"Their fear towards me is taught by the precept of men:" their motives for engaging in the service of God, were derived from the opinions and maxims of men. And surely a slight knowledge of our congregations will be sufficient to convince us, that the opinions of men are the great inducements with many, to attend the house of God; and that, if public opinion were changed with regard to the propriety of public worship, many, whose sentiments have undergone no change on the subject, would immediately forsake the assembling of themselves together in the house of God.

We are indeed thankful when public opinion so

far coincides with the word of God, as to sanction attendance upon his public ordinances; but if, instead of endeavouring to raise public opinion to the high and holy standard of God's word, and basing it upon its authority, we make the maxims of men the rule of our conduct, and our motives for engaging in God's service, so far we make void the law of God, and "in vain do we worship him."

Not only is the law of opinion an unscriptural standard for the regulation of our conduct, and, under the most favourable circumstances, a dangerous, as it is a variable criterion, and thus essentially different from the immutable law of God, which *alone* points out the nature of the worship God demands, and supplies us with proper motives for engaging in his service; but we invariably find that the law of opinion comes far short of the extent of God's requirements, and is, in many instances, in direct opposition to his revealed will. It will tolerate the outward garb of religion, and sanction the performance of the external duties of religion, but more highly approves of the outward acts of devotion, than the inward principles of piety. When we reflect on the nature of the law of opinion respecting the service of God, and the influence it exercises over society, it ought to lead us devoutly to pray that it may receive a higher tone, and be based on the authority of God's holy word.

It has been justly observed, that the law of opinion exercises a greater influence over society than the law of God, or the law of the land. "The penalties that attend the breach of God's law, some, nay, perhaps, most men seldom seriously

reflect on ; and amongst those that do, many, while they break the law, entertain thoughts of future reconciliation ; and as to the punishment due from the law of the land, they frequently flatter themselves with hopes of impunity. But no man escapes the punishment of their censure and dislike, who offends against the fashion and opinion of the company he keeps, and would recommend himself to. Nor is there one of ten thousand who is stiff and insensible enough to bear up under the constant dislike and condemnation of his own party." It is clear that the reverse of this ought to be the case—that the law of God ought to be the strongest, the law of the land the second strongest, and the law of opinion the weakest. Yet the more closely we examine the subject, the more evident it will appear, that opinion exercises over all ranks of society the most commanding influence. Allow me, then, dear brethren, affectionately to entreat you to examine the motives which induce you to attend the house of God. Do you do so out of compliance to the precept of men, or out of regard to your own reputation? If so, you may have your reward from men ; but you cannot expect to be blessed of God, unless you attend from scriptural motives. And it is worthy of observation, not only that that worship is vain which is taught by the precept of men ; but we find the strongest marks of God's disapprobation against teachers who inculcate such motives for engaging in God's service, and against the people who are actuated by such motives. For immediately after the Lord declares, "Their fear towards me is taught by the

precept of men," he adds, "Therefore, behold I will proceed to do a marvellous work among this people, even a marvellous work and a wonder; for the wisdom of the wise man shall perish, and the understanding of the the prudent shall be hid." A passage to which St. Paul emphatically alludes in 1 Cor. i. And he declares in chap. ii. 13, speaking of the things of God, that he spoke, "not in words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." And unless we attend the house of God from higher motives than submission to the precept or opinion of men, we can never expect "to know the things that are freely given to us of God." This leads us to notice,

5. A fifth cause which renders an attendance upon the services of the sanctuary vain and profitless — *want of faith, and want of firm reliance upon the Holy Spirit's gracious assistance.*

In the word of God we find a constant and inseparable connexion between faith and success; for whoever believes God's word, and trusts his promises, will not be disappointed. And a similar connexion exists between unbelief and failure. We have already shown that unbelief is one great cause "why the house of God is forsaken," and that faith is a necessary qualification for acceptable worship; for "without faith it is impossible to please God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." And many of the sad defects in public worship which we have noticed, and the little benefit derived from its ordinances, may be traced to the want of faith; for unbelief is

the great barrier between God and the soul; and the blessings of salvation can never reach the heart, until the reigning power of unbelief is subdued.

Surely, then, it is no marvel that so little benefit is derived from attending upon the ordinances of religion, when it is evident so many come up to the house of God without any believing apprehension of the blessings which the Lord promises to his faithful worshippers, and never realise the glorious truth, that we have "an High Priest over the house of God;" "a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle which the Lord pitched, and not man." And in dependence upon his merits and intercession, "draw near with a true heart, in the full assurance of faith;" expecting there and then to find "all the promises of God yea and amen in Christ Jesus."

Unbelief not only includes distrust of God's promises, and want of dependence upon Christ's merits, but also want of reliance upon the gracious aid of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is one great fruit of Christ's intercession, and the special promise he has made to his church. Without his aid, we can neither perform the duties, or enjoy the privileges, of the sanctuary. He alone can enable us to "worship the Father in spirit and in truth;" he alone can open our hearts to attend to the things which belong to our peace, and so clothe, with divine energy, the word of God, as to render it effectual to our conversion and sanctification. He must begin, carry on, and perfect, the work of grace in our hearts; and he alone can render the public means of grace effectual to such

ends. If the church of Christ is to be built up in her most holy faith, we must ever remember, "it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts."

Not only does the want of the Holy Spirit's aid and influences totally disqualify us for the services of the sanctuary, and prevent our deriving benefit from its ordinances, but, if this is specially the dispensation of the Spirit, and if the Spirit is ready to afford his gracious aid to those who feel their need and seek his assistance, then, it is not only vain to engage in the service of God while we slight or neglect the influences of his Holy Spirit, but there must be a high degree of provocation in overlooking that Divine Agent, "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy," and rashly endeavouring to derive profit from the means of grace, which have no power to convey any but what the Holy Spirit imparts.

II. In treating of the circumstances which render the services of the sanctuary unprofitable, we made no attempt to distinguish between the causes of the total want of profit in some, and those which occasion comparatively little profit in others. We should be sorry to identify those who derive *some* advantage from public worship, and who bitterly lament that they do not derive more, with those who derive no benefit, and who neither feel nor deplore their loss. Nor can we conceive the former deliberately giving expression to the sentiments contained in our text; whereas many of the latter feel, and openly avow, there is no pleasure nor profit found in God's service. While these two

classes may differ widely as to their state before God, the same causes which totally disqualify the one for performing the duties and deriving benefit from the ordinances of religion may, more or less, in proportion as they are under their influence, disqualify the other for performing the duties and deriving the *full* benefit of divine ordinances. The circumstances, therefore, which render attendance upon public worship unprofitable, will supply materials for most useful and diligent self-examination, even to those who derive considerable advantage from its ordinances.

There are some considerations which might reasonably have been expected by those who feel and lament they do not derive more benefit from the public means of grace. As we have, in a preceding discourse, pointed out the motives which should lead to the observance of public worship, and the spirit in which its ordinances ought to be attended, we shall now confine our observations to the application of our subject, which may furnish some additional hints to those who may be anxious to improve by them. There are *four particulars* specified by the Lord, as reasons for his having no pleasure in those worshippers and their services, whom he charges, in our text, with saying that they found his service to be vain and profitless. These particulars are stated in chap. i. 8. 13:—"They brought the *blind*, the *lame*, the *sick*, and the *torn*, for sacrifice." This was literally the case; but it has a spiritual signification, and aptly points out different classes of public worshippers, which have existed in all ages, and may be found among ourselves.

We are fully borne out in the truth of this observation from the fact, that the same terms are frequently employed in Scripture to denote the spiritual state of individuals.

First, "the blind."—This term is applied by our Lord to the scribes and pharisees, and was one of the characteristic features of the church at Laodicea. It denotes spiritual ignorance,—ignorance of our own state and character,—ignorance of our wants and necessities,—ignorance of God and of his service,—and of the gracious provision which he has made for our recovery and preservation from sin,—and of the means by which we can obtain these spiritual blessings. This spiritual ignorance forms a characteristic feature in many public worshippers. They come to the house of God without any intelligent apprehension of the nature of the services in which they are about to engage; they perceive not, and consequently enter not into, the spirituality of these services; and so far are their services from being "reasonable services," that they are but "the sacrifice of fools." They hear without spiritual discernment, and understand not what they hear; and thus resemble the wayside hearers, because they do not understand: "The devil cometh, and taketh away the word out of their hearts." Thus their devotion is blind, and their hearing vain. We would direct such to Jesus, who, when on earth, made the blind to see his glory, and who has promised to give light to them that sit in darkness, and who commands the spiritually blind "to anoint their eyes with eye-salve, that they may see."

Secondly, those who may be denominated "the lame," or those whose hearts are not engaged in God's service, and who reluctantly come up to worship in his holy temple. They seem to halt between two opinions. A sense of duty, and a regard for their reputation, impel them to attend the house of God; but their own feelings and inclinations render them averse to engage in its services. Such persons frequently make no scruple of coming in after the service has begun, clearly evincing in what light estimation it is held, how easily they can dispense with a part, how little they regard the devotion of their fellow-worshippers, which is disturbed by the practice, or feel concern for His glory whom they professedly come up to worship. Such indeed may say, "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?" For though they dare not omit, they delight not to perform, the duties of religion; and they fail in that essential qualification for acceptable and profitable worship—to seek God, not only with their heart, but with their *whole* heart.

Thirdly, those who are styled "the sick." The term "sick" is employed in Isaiah i. v. to denote the corruption of the judgment, and the alienation of the affections from God:—"The whole head is sick, and the whole heart is faint." This description of man's state does not merely convey to us the idea of want of knowledge and spiritual discernment. These are defects; but they convey to us distinctly the idea of something positively and

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radically wrong in the judgment and the affections. And thus we find individuals in our congregations, who not only reject spiritual knowledge, but who pass a wrong judgment on the truth proposed for their reception. Just as the sick reject wholesome food, and it becomes unpalatable, and fails to nourish them, on account of their disease; so the blessings of salvation are rejected and perverted, through the corruption of the judgment and the depravity of the heart; pride, and prejudice, and the love of sin, all combining to cloud the light of truth, and totally to disqualify them for the profitable performance of the duties of the sanctuary.

A fourth particular by which some public worshippers are characterised is, "the bringing the torn for sacrifice." This is forcibly and aptly descriptive of a mind agitated and distracted by the cares, the anxieties, the business, and the pleasures of life. And does not such a state of mind characterise many public worshippers in our own day, and among ourselves? They come up to the house of God without any preparation of heart or solemnity of mind, and resign themselves to the current of their voluntary thoughts; worldliness and levity distract their minds, and divert their attention from the great concerns of the eternal world, and the solemn services of the temple in which they have assembled. Where the mind is unenlightened, and the heart unimpressed by the power of truth, such a state of mind is rarely felt or lamented. But to the children of God, whose minds are enlightened, and whose hearts the Lord hath touched, there are few sub-

jects more generally or deeply lamented, than the difficulty they find in waiting upon God without distraction. They would gladly concentrate all their feelings in devotion, and exclude all worldly or vain thoughts; yet they find their efforts to resist the distracting cares and anxieties of life, during the time of divine service, for the most part unavailing, and some are compelled to feel, "I was almost in all evil in the midst of the congregation and assembly." Such sad defects in public worship may arise in a great degree from want of due preparation of heart; for if we neglect the state of our heart, and the frame of our mind, previous to our assembling in the sanctuary, we cannot expect *at once* to have our hearts engaged in its services, and to exclude those thoughts which have been entertained up to the very moment in which we are called to engage in spiritual worship.

Allow me then, in conclusion, my dear Christian brethren, to offer a few hints, which may, under the divine blessing, tend to correct an evil which so disqualifies us for the profitable performance and enjoyment of the services of the sanctuary. If you would exclude distracting thoughts and corroding cares during the time of divine service, you must diligently prepare your heart, and endeavour to bring your mind into a spiritual frame, *before* you come up to the house of God; and *after* you enter its courts, you must strenuously resist, not only all sinful and vain thoughts, but every thought which tends to divert your attention from those services in which you are engaged. Look for present blessings from *each* service at the time you are

engaged in it, and if you do so, you will soon find the necessity of resisting every thought, even on serious subjects, which does not tend immediately to further this object; for irrelevant thoughts will not only divert your attention from the immediate subjects before you, and prevent your obtaining from them the blessings they were designed to convey, but by resigning yourselves to them, as there is no special object to direct or control them, you know not *how far* they may divert your attention from the services in which you ought to be engaged.

Above all, let me direct you to look to the great Master of assemblies, "that his presence may go with you to his temple, and there give you rest;" that you may obtain from him who is 'the Author and Giver of every good and perfect gift,' that calm serenity of mind, and composure of spirit, which are so essential for the profitable performance and enjoyment of its services. Remember that you have "an High Priest over the house of God"—"the minister of the sanctuary"—and place all your dependence upon him, and seek his grace to have "every thought brought into captivity to his obedience," and earnestly implore the gift of the Holy Spirit, that you may "worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness." Thus, being planted in the house of the Lord, may you flourish in the courts of the house of our God." Amen.

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